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CAPTAIN CRACK-SHOT, The Girl Brigand; or, Gipsy Jack from Jimtown.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, "GILT-EDGED DICK," "BONANZA BILL," ETC., ETC.



MOST MEN WOULD HAVE BEEN APPALLED AT THE FEARFUL SIGHT, BUT JACK WAS NOT.

Captain Crack-Shot, THE GIRL BRIGAND;

OR,
Gipsy Jack From Jintown.

A STORY OF DURANGO.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK," "BOSS BOB,"
"ROSEBUD ROB," "GILT-EDGED
DICK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DELEGATE FROM JIMTOWN.

It was not many months ago that the discovery of gold at Durango, Colorado, brought the usual influx of miners and adventurers to the then little town of fifty or sixty inhabitants, and it immediately began to "boom" toward the size and population of a small city.

Miners, speculators, gamblers and roughs flocked to the new Eldorado; shanties and business places were rapidly constructed; the streets, rude and irregular, presented a busy scene, as people rushed to and fro, as if in a great hurry lest some industrious mortal should get more of the "dirt" than they.

For gold there was upon the flats and in the hills that fringed them, and, it being mostly in placer washes, was easy to get.

The flats which surrounded the town presented a scene none the less busy. Everywhere men were digging with pick and shovel in the sandy surface, and a system of sluice-boxes laid from the mountains, a mile away, furnished the "wash" for each miner's dirt.

The surface in places did not produce "pay," and in such instances a shaft had been sunk and a one-horse-power windlass provided for hauling up the dirt and rock and dumping it into a cart, from whence it was hauled away to the vicinity of the stamp-mills, yet uncompleted, and dumped in corded piles until it could be milled.

Mining for quartz was also being carried on to some extent in the adjacent hills and gulches, but it formed only a small percentum of the business done upon the flats.

The claims were small and numerous, and it was not unusual that the owner of a claim had stuck up his tent and lived where he worked, in order to guard against invasion upon his rights.

Consequently, with these little canvas habitations dotted about, it looked as if an army of troops had camped out upon the flats below the bustling young city.

Here and there about the flats were staked out claims that yet remained for sale in the hands of speculators, who, foreseeing a "spec," had lumped off the territory previous to the cry of "gold ho!" and were now realizing on their investment most handsomely.

The more people there came the higher was asked for leases, and in some cases thousands of dollars were paid for small pieces of the earth, which had good promise of yielding largely of the auriferous.

And, remarkable to relate, there were, of all the humans who had flocked hence to populate Durango, only about half a dozen women, and these, with two exceptions, were wives or daughters of miners—the exceptions being a couple of girls from Leadville, who had set up a cigar and lunch stand down on the flats.

These girls were known as Gertie and Josie Wood. They always attended strictly to their business, and repulsed any advances made toward familiarity; hence had earned the sobriquet among the miners of "Spunk" and "Hornet."

One day, when the streets of Durango were less crowded than usual, a cavalcade of three on horseback galloped leisurely into the town from the north.

In the lead was a flat-visaged, comical-looking Chinaman, dressed in the inevitable white frock, pants and sandals, with his pig-tail gayly ornamented with ribbons, and a shiny silk hat upon his head, slightly cocked to one side. He was mounted upon a fine gray horse, and was a good rider.

Next behind him came a beautiful white horse, of well-rounded body and clean limbs, aside of which rode a wild, Gipsyish-looking fellow, who was sure to attract more than a passing glance. His age ranged somewhere between twenty-one and twenty-five years, though his face still possessed much of boyhood's freshness.

He wore a graceful black mustache, which was waxed to a point at the ends; his mouth

was firm and habitually pleasant in expression; his whole face in fact was "handsome," with dark, magnetic eyes; his hair was dark and abundant, and fell in a graceful wavy ripple over his shoulders.

Upon his head he wore a round red cap, without any 'scoop,' but ornamented with elaborate embroidery in blue, white and gold, with a cord and tassel behind.

His attire otherwise, consisted of fine boots with patent-leather knee tops; white-tanned buckskin breeches, fringed; a "biled" shirt with a broad open collar at the throat, and a cluster diamond pin, upon the polished bosom, and a short red velvet jacket, trimmed with gold lace and silver buttons.

Then, too, he rode without saddle or bridle, with the greatest apparent ease, a word or motion serving to guide his handsome steed.

The third rider was a medium sized, shaggy dog, also mounted, bare-back, upon a perfect mate of the first white horse, and riding with as great apparent ease as his master.

He was an intelligent-looking canine, with an open countenance, and eyes that sparkled knowingly and with mischief.

Such was the noticeable trio as they rode into town, attracting no little attention from the bystanders.

In front of a small "office," which stood midway up the main street, the three horses were halted; their riders dismounted and entered the office in question.

It was a small affair, divided in the middle by a counter, behind which a bald-headed party presided.

He was a fat old chap, with a face habitually sour in expression, sharp gray eyes, and a double chin. He wore no beard, and had but very little of the hirsute on his cranium. A spotless shirt-front was ornamented by a single diamond of great size and brilliancy, and a pair of gold-rimmed glasses were bridged upon a very prominent and highly-colored nose.

The Chinaman and the dog immediately took seats on entering, while their master advanced to the counter.

"You, I suppose, are the manager of this institution, eh?" he inquired.

"I am, sir," was the jerky reply, and the fat party went on writing.

"Who are you, sir?"

"Well, I am Gipsy Jack, from Jintown, you see. My other companions are Shy Sam, from Formosa, and Skip, my dorg. The latter, in particular, is a very extraordinary person."

"Presumably so, but as I am not cultivating canine acquaintances, if you have any business, be kind enough to state it briefly," the fat party said, tartly.

"Oh! ye needn't be afeard o' my dorg," Gipsy Jack assured, calmly. "He don't notice common folk, unless they're up to mischief. As to business, that's what I'm here for, exactly. Your name is John Metcalf, isn't it?"

"That is my name, sir."

"And you own several claims on the flats, below?"

"I do, sir. Do you want to purchase?"

"Well, that depends. What do you ask for the claim No. 30?"

"Ten thousand dollars. It is a double track, and what with being alongside the creek which crosses the flats, and being in close proximity to several of the best claims, it is well worth double the amount."

"Humph! yes, I s'pose," Jack said, taking off his cap and giving his curly head a scratch. "By the way, how much did you pay for this claim 30 when you purchased it?"

The broker did not answer immediately, but busied himself with his pen a few minutes, to conceal any agitation he may have had.

"That is a matter that hardly concerns you," he finally replied.

"Oh, suit yourself about that. I know just how much you paid for it."

"How much, sir?"

"Nary a copper! The claim was left in your charge by an old so-called witch, Mexican Mag, until I should come forward to claim it. Therefore, appeareth I, Gipsy Jack, to take possession."

"Impossible, sir! I purchased the claim from the Mexican woman, and shall not yield it to any one short of the sum I ask for it!"

"Oh! you won't, eh?"

"Decidedly not, sir!"

"But, supposing I have the audacity to dispute your right, and go and take possession in defiance?"

"Then I'll have you put off, in a hurry, sir."

"Sure of it?"

"Absolutely certain. If you do not wish to

get yourself into trouble, you'd best keep off from what is not yours."

"But it is mine. Mexican Mag willed it to me! I can prove it by Shy Sam, here, and my dorg, Skip!"

"That does not matter, sir. I have a deed of the claim, and it is mine, and I shall hold it."

"Who signed the deed?" Gipsy Jack demanded calmly.

"The Mexican woman, of course."

"That's a lie. She couldn't write!"

Metcalf's face flushed angrily.

"Get out of my office, you insulting rowdy!" he cried, "or I'll put you out!"

"No you won't! You're no fool, not to know that you've too much avoidupois to handle me. When I get ready, I'll go. I shall take possession of Mexican Mag's claim. If you offer to trouble me, I'll blow your brains out, and feed you to Skip! D'ye understand?"

"I'll see about it. Set foot on that claim, if you dare, and I'll give you cause to regret it."

"Very well. I'll look out for you. If there's a cemetery around here I'd advise you to speak for a lot, in case you contemplate instituting a sanguinary campaign against me. Skip, dorg, do you see the bald-headed delegate?"

The sagacious canine gave a bark, and a knowing nod of his head. He evidently fully understood what was asked of him.

"Well, what is your estimate of his character?" Jack asked, lighting a cigar.

The dog got down upon the floor, thrust his tail between his legs, hung his head, and looked decidedly sneakish.

"Ha! ha! that's just my idea, too," the man from Jintown said. "Now, Skip, how would you like a good sirloin steak off from this bald-headed delegate?"

The dog hung his head still lower and gagged, as if the idea were not to his liking.

John Metcalf uttered a curse, and Gipsy Jack laughed.

"You see, even the dog can read you! I shall go down and take possession of the claim, now. If I see you over that way, look out you don't get shot. Good-day!"

Then the remarkable stranger strode from the office, accompanied by his dog, and followed by Shy Sam.

When he had gone, the speculator uttered a curse, and paced to and fro within his office, in a great state of excitement.

"Fool that I was not to get rid of that claim, before!" he growled, savagely. "Now, the deuce is to pay. This new-comer is no ordinary rough with whom I have to cope. He is fearless and cunning, but he shall find me equal to the emergency!"

Taking a large brass star from a drawer in the counter, he went to the office door, and attached it to the outside knob, with a small screw, and then returned to his writing.

What significance had the star? Was it a signal of distress, or of warning?

It is probable that not one out of a hundred noticed it, in passing the office, and yet it was not long ere one individual caught sight of it, crossed the street, and entered the speculator's office.

He was a burly, six-foot ruffian, with black bristling hair and beard, and a face with an ugly, brutal expression.

He was roughly dressed, and a belt about his waist contained a formidable array of revolvers and knives, giving him at once a warlike and dangerous appearance.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW PHASE—THE DOG AT CARDS.

GIPSY JACK and his companions did not return to the flats, after leaving the speculator's office, but rode on into the heart of the town, and drew up before the principal combined hotel, saloon, and gambling-place, known as the 'Old Bourbon—Kentucky. Bill, proprietor.'

Here, to the amazement of the crowd, the Gipsy and his dog began a free bit of circus, for the benefit of those who were disposed to take in all the free sights.

He stood upon his hands, on top of the horse, with his feet in air, and while poised in this position, the sagacious brute made a flying leap from the back of the other white horse, and landed upon Gipsy Jack's elevated feet, only to stand erect upon his own hind feet, and give vent to a victorious bark.

The feat was greeted with a wild shout of applause, and the bystanders gathered nearer as Skip leaped back to his own horse and turned a complete somersault in so doing—a wonderful act by the way, seldom to be seen under any circumstances.

"I say, young feller, w'at'll ye take fer ther dorg? Jumpin' Jehosephat, thet ar' ther cutest canine I evyer sot eyes on, ef I war raised in a dorg country. Speak up, pilgrim! Ef ye want ter sell thet dorg, all ye've got ter dew is name a reasonable number o' shinin' crowns, an' they're yours sure's my handle's Old Somersault, ther great consolidated two-footed caravan an' menagery o' ther Nor'west!"

"The dog is not for sale—not for all the money in Durange," Gipsy Jack replied, himself turning a complete somersault on back of his horse, and then pausing to take a squint at the purchaser—that would be. "I and my dorg aire inseparable, stranger, an' ye might as well try to keep us apart, as ter keep potato bugs off'n vines."

Old Somersault, whom he was addressing, was the very essence of a rough, time-worn, weather-beaten old mountain man, whose whole life had probably been mostly made up with scrimmages with wild animals and their equally savage neighbors, the red-skins.

He was rather short in stature, but wiry and supple, a man not easy to handle, except taken at a disadvantage. He was also possessed of a keen, shrewd eye, and his face, for a most part covered with a mixed brown and gray stubble of beard, was honest and good-natured in expression. There was a waggish contortion about the mouth, however, that proclaimed him one of those mortals who are never so happy as when spinning some gigantic and improbable yarn.

He was attired from head to foot in tight-fitting buckskin, with a belt around his waist containing a couple of revolvers which looked as though they had served a long war campaign; and the same could be said of the rifle which he leaned upon—a long, heavy instrument, unplated and unpretentious, and yet, in his estimation, probably worth a half-dozen of the latter-day "new-fangled shutin' masheens," as he would have expressed it mildly.

"I allow thet a hundred Williams w'u'd tickle ye, eh?" he said, with a broad grin.

"No, nor a thousand of them," Gipsy Jack replied. "The dog can't be bought at no price."

At this instant a man was passing by, carrying a framed paper banner mounted upon a pole. The banner contained the advertisement of some local shindig which was to come off, and this means was adopted for heralding the news to those whose feet yearned for Terpsichorean exercise.

The dog, Skip, however, seemed to construe the banner for a different use, and making a spring from the top of his horse's back, he went through it like a rocket, and landed upon the veranda of the Old Bourbon.

The half-breed delegate who had been carrying the banner uttered a savage growl, and whipped a pis ol from his belt, but, ere he could use it, Gipsy Jack had leaped to the ground and seized him by the collar.

"Hold on, my friend!" he said, in his calm yet impressive way. "That ar dorg belongs to me, and if you don't want your neck broke, you'll do well to let him alone."

"I'll shoot him; he spoil banner!" the offended carrier growled.

"No, you won't kill him either!" Jack warned, and by a sudden effort, he raised the strapping fellow and hurled him as neatly over his head as though he had been a mere stick.

Then, bounding upon the back of his handsome horse, he uttered a wild laugh, and dashed back down the street toward the flats, followed by his two extraordinary companions.

Claim No. 30 was situated about in the center of the flats, and consisted of a square acre of surface ground, one side of which bordered upon a narrow, deep creek, which flowed silently across the golden bottom-lands. The main trail from the town across the flats also ran on the opposite side of the creek, making 30 one of the handiest situated claims on the flats.

That aft'noon, for the first time in the history of the mining excitement, a tent was reared upon this tract, and Gipsy Jack and pards took possession, as they had threatened.

Posted upon a tree on the front side of the claim was a placard printed in a neat hand, which vouchsafed the following warning:

NOTICE!

"Your humble servant, Gipsy Jack, having taken possession of his own lawful heritage, begs leave to announce that he proposes to dig here as long as 'pay-dirt' is found. Any galoot having aught to propose to the contrary will not be dealt with according to Scripture, but will get just the measure his conduct merits. Our motto is: 'Watch your

neighbor—mind your biz—hang to yer rights!' Take notice: Sure death to old maids, speculators and missionaries. Yours, etc.,

"GIPSY JACK AND PARDS."

The notice received due attention from nearly every passer-by, but none ventured to invade the domains of the eccentric stranger far enough to make his acquaintance.

It was evidently not his forte to work, for he mounted a hammock upon some poles outside of the tent and deposited his anatomy therein, engaging in a smoke, while Shy Sam did the work.

Thus the first day of his arrival passed, and no attempt was made to eject him from the claim. If it was John Metcalf's intention to have him vacate, he had evidently taken no steps in the matter as yet.

When night came, or, rather, early dusk, Gipsy Jack sauntered up into the village, accompanied by his dog, leaving Shy Sam behind to look after things at the claim.

As he passed along up the main street, he attracted more than ordinary notice, as did Skip, whose feats earlier in the day had won for him a wide repute.

The first man Gipsy Jack met, to speak to, was Old Somersault, and it was the latter who blockaded his path, and spoke first.

"Good-evenin'," he said. "I allow ye won't offend ef I remark thet I've took an interest in ye, pard, all on account o' your dorg."

"Certainly not," the young man from Jimtown replied. "Not unfrequently I make acquaintance because of my dog."

"He's a wonderful dorg. I ken skeercely turn a better somersault myself than he, ef I do say et. Yer name's Gipsy Jack?"

"Yes."

"And ye are a Gipsy?"

"Not at all. The handle originated, probably, from my wild, roving disposition."

"Oh! thet's it, hey! Waal, I reckon ef you're as gud as ye look, ye'll come right side up with care, tho' I don't mind tellin' ye thet ye'd better keep your eyes peeled."

"Ah! and why? Is there danger threatening me?"

"I allow thar is. Ef ye've a spare minnute, we'll squat on ther log, over yonder, an' I'll put ye on to something ye mebbe don't know."

"Very good. I am always ready to hear anything of interest."

They accordingly seated themselves upon a fallen log, in the shade of a cluster of trees, a few yards back from the street, and then the old scout proceeded:—

"Ye see, thet aire claim ye've squatted on, is likely ter git ye inter trouble, case et ar'n't the most desirable piece o' property, imaginable. Thar's a score o' galoots wot claim et, an', then thar's John Metcalf, who sez he's bought et, an' so et goes."

"That don't alarm me in the least, my friend," Gipsy Jack replied, with a good-natured laugh. "I reckon possession is several points, and then I can prove that Mexican Mag, the witch, willed it to me, on her death-bed."

"The old skiffint's dead, hey?"

"Yes. Got killed by falling over a precipice, up North. I ran across her, just as she was going off the handle, and she declared me her heir to this piece of property."

"Humph! I don't calkylate ye're in much luck, tho' et aire mighty temptin', thet claim 30. But, jest salt away ther testimony of Old Somersault—ye've a pile o' fightin' ter do, afore ye get thru. An' ther worst o' et is, ye've got a woman ter contend wi'. Consarn my old menagerie ef I wouldn't rather swaller an annerconda, an' use an elefant's trunk fer a toothpick, than tuck ag'in' a woman."

"Humph! I never have any trouble with them. Who is this one you refer to?"

"A hummer! a reg'lar ourang-outang daredevil, wi' no more regard fer law an' persons than the wildest cat thet ever held a jubilee in ther Arcadian forests o' yore!" Somersault said, impressively.

"Ye've heerd tell about Capt. Crack-Shot, the girl outlaw, hev'n't ye?"

"No, I can't say that I have!"

"Waal, that's queer. She's well known, hyarabouts, you bet, an' she ain't a bit afeard ter make herself acquainted, nuther, when she thinks she can get any ducats. She's old Mexican Mag's adopted daughter, they say—least-how, she claims that No. 30 is hern, an' warns every galoot to keep off from it, who don't want to git shipped into the future!"

"Dangerous, eh?" Gipsy Jack commented idly. "Oh! well, I dare say she won't scare me a great deal. As to the man, Metcalf, probably he and thes' other chaps you speak of, will consolidate, eh?"

"Like as not. They are roughs, every one of 'em, who have at times loaned Mexican Mag money to gamble with, and now demand an interest in the property she's left."

"Well, let 'em come. If they want to dispute my rights, I'll hear their argument. As to the future of claim 30, it's mine—and if I don't have it, no one else will ever get rich off from et. Just remember that, in the face of future circumstances, will you?"

Later that evening Gipsy Jack and his dog entered a gambling palace on the main street, and sauntered about, watching the various games in progress.

It was evidently not his purpose to play, but he was all the same possessed of a knowledge of the business, as was manifest by a faint smile when he would see a man make a bad "lay."

The burly ruffian who had entered the office of John Metcalf earlier that same afternoon, was engaged in a game of poker with a professional sharp, and made a mismove which lost him the game.

Looking up, he caught sight of the stranger, and noted the faint smile upon his face.

"Hello! what you grinnin' at?" he growled, with an oath. "Mebbe ye think you could 'a' played ther game better?"

"Presumedly, yes, were I a gambler, which I am not," was the quiet answer. "My dog here, however, I dare say, could learn you something about cards."

"Hurrah! Let's see him!" cried a number. "Put up your dorg, stranger!"

"If you are anxious to put up the money, all right," Jack replied. "I'll set my dog on the table, and you can let your best three-card monte man flip out his pasteboards, and my dorg will pick out the winning card every time."

"Here's Black Bill—he's your man," the proprietor of the place said, indicating the ruffian who had addressed our man from Jimtown. "Bill, he takes the cake at throwing the keards squar."

"I allow I kin do et!" Bill declared, "an' no livin' dorg kin beat me. Hyar's a pile o' ten golden eagles, an' ther ace o' spades wins 'em. Heer I have ther ace o' spades, three-spot of diamonds, and two-spot of clubs!" and as he spoke he gave them a dextrous flip upon the table, with the backs up. "Now, I'll bet ther ten eagles hyar, ag'in' ther same amount, thet ther ain't no dorg living who kin turn up ther ace o' spades ther first time tryin'!"

"I'll take the bet; make it a thousand if you like!" Gipsy Jack said, taking a large roll of greenbacks from his pocket, with a laugh.

CHAPTER III.

A GENERAL "CIRCUS."

THERE was excitement within the Old Bourbon as the man from Jimtown spoke a single word to his canine companion, and the sagacious animal leaped upon the table.

"Good boy, Skip!" Gipsy Jack said, patting the dog on its back. "You're always on time. Now, these citizens around here have got an idea that you can't play monte as well as they, and in order to convince them to the contrary, I want to blindfold you, and then want you to place your paw on the one of the three cards you see lying here which is in your estimation the ace of spades. Do you think the dealer yonder has any tricks hidden up his sleeve?"

Skip shook his head in the negative, and wagged his tail, whereat the crowd laughed heartily.

Bets were made rapidly on the result, and large sums were wagered against the success of the dog.

Allowing the bystanders plenty of time to make their bets, Jack bound a handkerchief in front of his dog's eyes, and then turned to the man, Black Bill, with whom he had bet.

"Look sharp now, man!" he said. "Be sure there's no trickery, before I proceed, or there'll be a growl afterwards. Is it all square now?"

"It 'pears so," Black Bill growled. "Go ahead. Ef I lose, it won't be the first time in my life."

"All right. Skip, get ready now. Take a topographical claryvoyant survey of the country, and at the same time pick up the ace of spades."

The blindfolded dog obeyed by selecting one

of the cards, and picking it up between his teeth.

Examination proved that the Jimtownite had won.

Skip had picked up the ace of spades, sure enough, and at the first attempt.

"Cuss yer dorg!" Black Bill snarled. "It was only by chance he did it, you bet. Ken't chuck no humbug down me."

"Perhaps you are anxious to play again?" Gipsy Jack said, pocketing the result of his successful wager together with what he had invested.

"Yas, I am. I'll bet ther last o' my pile ther dorg can't do et a second time, ther first try, an' you leave him blindfolded, just as he is now—a straight thousand on it!"

"That fits me!" the Jimtownite responded, counting out the sum in greenbacks. "A thousand it is. Any other gents want to be accommodated with a thousand bet?"

No one, evidently; too many had lost on the canine to be tempted again.

The monte man, however, had the "sand," and put up his "chips" to the extent of a thousand dollars—probably the last of his money.

Then, seizing a new pack of cards, he expertly threw them upside down upon the table.

"Are you sure there is an ace among them?" Gipsy Jack demanded, sternly. "I want no trickery in this matter, understand me!"

"Let your dog answer!" Black Bill sneered. "If there's an ace on the board, he'll find et, according to *your* theory."

"So he will; and if there's not an ace, you lose, the same."

Then with a word to the dog, the animal walked over and about the cards, and nosing three aside from the rest, selected the middle one of the trio, and held it up between his teeth so all could see.

It was the ace of hearts!

The crowd uttered a shout of surprise, and Black Bill uttered a cry of rage, as he saw Gipsy Jack pocket his last dollar.

"Curses on ye!" he cried. "What ye win in money, you shall lose in dog—mark my word for it!"

And before any one was aware of his intention he had drawn a pistol, and fired at Skip.

The poor animal gave vent to a piteous howl, and bounded from the table to the floor, where it gave a few struggles and stretched out as if dead.

Gipsy Jack stood for a moment as if struck dumb with astonishment and sorrow; then turning, he leaped upon Black Bill with a fierce cry, and they began a rough-and-tumble struggle for the mastery.

Several miners sprung forward to take the ruffian's part, but as many more intercepted them, and in less than five minutes two parties were plainly formed—one for Gipsy Jack and one for Black Bill, and soon all were fighting vigorously for the men who had their sympathy.

Be it said in his favor, Gipsy Jack had the best men on his side.

Black Bill's party, however, was composed of the ruffian element, and was numerically larger than the other side, and as they fought without regard for life, it seemed evident that they must eventually win.

Crack! bang! clash! scream! were sounds that transformed the interior of the saloon into a literal pandemonium.

Men were shot down ruthlessly, and knives flashed; shouts of agony, oaths and curses were uttered on every hand; it was a terrible hand-to-hand conflict between those knights of the border, which promised not to cease until the last man was 'cleaned out.'

The struggle between Gipsy Jack and Black Bill was a stern, unyielding one, both men being possessed of great determination—for the man who lost would be a fit subject for the undertaker.

They were pretty nearly matched in point of strength, too, though the gambler-ruffian was taller and heavier than his plucky oppo-

nent from Jimtown. They clinched in a vise-like hug, and waltzed about without doing each other any great amount of damage.

"Curse ye, let me go!" Black Bill cried, as Gipsy Jack froze to him like a postage stamp.

"Ef ye don't, I'll stamp ye out of existence!"

"Will ye!" the Jimtownite retorted, working gradually toward the front door. "If you get an advantage, it will not be my fault. You killed my dog, and your life shall answer for it!"

"It will, hey?" the ruffian yelled, lunging forward and bumping his head severely against that of his antagonist. "Dog my cats ef I don't stave in yer skull!"

"Oho! come on! Perhaps two can play at that game," Jack responded, returning the bump.

And then began the novel battle of heads, in dead earnest, to see which could stand the most.

Bump! whack! bump! went the foreheads of the two men—crack! clash! was the accompaniment kept by the other fighters.

Steadily Jack worked his man back toward the door, and finally they were out in the open air.

Here matters were no better.

It appeared as if the whole town were undergoing a siege, for men were fighting along the whole length of the street, using revolvers, knives and any weapon they could get hold of.

Matters were the same on the flats as in the town, and it seemed as if Gipsy Jack's turn against the gambler, had been instrumental in setting the whole town into a general state of warfare.

Which went to show that there were two parties who wished to run the town, and a chance had been improved to test the matter of mastery.

Outside the tavern Jack and his opponent had much more room to exercise in, yet could not trip or throw each other, and had nothing left to resort to but the battering-ram assault of their heads.

This they continued with much regularity, pausing occasionally, as it were, to compare notes.

"How do you like it?" Jack demanded, grimly. "Like to play at ten-pins?"

"Cuss ye!" the gambler growled gaspingly.

"What kind of a head have you got?"

"A cocoanut head, of course. Why it's cast-iron, and you can't bust et, if you try."

"Then I want to cry quits. I've got enough!"

"What, so soon? But you must get more'n enough. I think a little more butting will wake you up!"

And that the Jimtown delegate proceeded to administer, with renewed energy.

But Black Bill had had enough and by a desperate effort he broke loose and dashed away down the street, at the top of his speed.

At the same instant the dog, Skip, sprung forth from the tavern, and off in hot pursuit of the ruffian. He had not been killed, as Jack had supposed, but stunned by the bullet, which had just grazed the top of his head, and had recovered and got out of the saloon just in time to see Black Bill make a run for it.

Comprehending the situation with his natural sagacity, he uttered a bark of victory, and dashed after the gambler, and soon both dog and man had vanished from view, by dodging around a corner.

Then Gipsy Jack turned and gazed about him, undecided what to do.

The whole neighborhood was in a riot—which party should he side with? was his thought just as there was a sudden whiz; then a lasso settled over his head and tightened around his waist, and he was landed on the ground.

He made a quick attempt to spring to his feet, but before he could do so three masked men had leaped upon him, and were not long in binding him hand and foot.

He was then handed to another man, on horseback, who had ridden suddenly up to the

spot, and the next thing he knew Gipsy Jack was being borne away across a corner of the flats, toward the distant rugged mountains.

His lone captor was a powerfully built man, with gray hair and beard, which was met by a black mask, through which a pair of evil eyes occasionally peered into the face of the prisoner.

His attire was buckskin from boots to chin, dyed jetty black, with a belt full of revolvers at his waist, and a plumed slouch hat upon his head.

Seeing that he made no motion to speak, Jack opened the conversation.

"Where are you taking me?" he demanded.

"To Crow's Nest," was the reply.

"Where is Crow's Nest?"

"In the mountains."

"What kind of a place is it?"

"Bully place."

"Who runs it?"

"Captain Crack-Shot."

"Humph! The female footpad, eh? Why are you taking me there?"

"Because she ordered it."

"Well, that's cheeky. Know what her ladyship proposes to do with me?"

"Shoot you, I reckon."

"What for?"

"Dunno."

"Well, it's queer. I hope, however, you are mistaken. How old is this noble road-agent?"

"Nineteen or so."

"Got any relatives around here?"

"Reckon not."

"Good-looking?"

"Wait till ye see her."

"How long will that be?"

"Couple of hours."

"Hurry up, then! I'm not riding very comfortably, you know."

Half an hour found them entering a wild, craggy, mountainous district, ascending a rugged path toward the top of a wooded, boulderous mountain.

For a couple of hours they continued the monotonous ascent—then they emerged upon a natural level shelf upon the side of the mountain, from whence a good view could be had of the distant town of Durango.

As they rode upon the plateau a gayly-attired girl in men's clothing emerged from a niche in the face of the mountain, and this Gipsy Jack concluded must be Captain Crack-Shot, the girl road agent!

CHAPTER IV.

A SCOUNDREL UNMASKS.

It was near midnight when the riot ceased in and about Durango, without declaring victory for either party, although the ruffianly element had possession of the village, and the more peaceably disposed citizens had been driven down to the flats.

Here they could do little but wait for daylight, when they must either renew the attack, or give up the struggle and declare the ruffians their masters.

Having possession of the business portion of the village, it might be surmised that they would not yield it without a bloody struggle.

From the beginning of the fight almost, Old Somersault had been here, there and everywhere, in the lead as a sort of captain in behalf of the citizens' party. But owing to the overwhelming odds of numbers in favor of the roughs, he could finally see no better plan than a general retreat to the flats for consultation and repairs, which move was made, according to his orders.

A good many persons had been wounded, and some killed among the defenders, but the other party had had the same luck, if not more so.

A general camp, in body, was ordered by Old Somersault, near the center of the flats. Fires were built and pickets posted, the same precautions being observed by the old scout as if it was an Indian campaign.

John Metcalf, the speculator, was among the citizens' party, but whether by choice or acci-

dent it is hard to tell. He claimed to be out a great deal of money by the riot, as he owned an interest in several business establishments, and had several thousand dollars locked up in his office.

"I propose that a party of you men accompany me back and help me secure the money, at least," he said. "We can easily creep back, under the cover of darkness, and secure the money."

"If the captain says so, all right," one of the miners suggested—"otherwise, not a man shall leave camp, ef I can stop him."

"I was not aware that we are subject to the orders of a captain," Metcalf sneered.

"But we are, though," the miner replied, whose name was Tiger.

"We're in ther midst of a consarned difficulty, an' we want some one ter lead us. I purpose thet Old Somersault knows how ter do ther matter up brown, an' we'd better let him take ther lead, an' we go accordin' ter his instructions. Eh, boys, what d'ye say?"

"Hurrah! Old Somersault, forever!" shouted the crowd.

"Thankee, gents," the scout said. "It does me proud ter represent ye, an' ef my old menagerie ar' wuth a cent, ye kin bet yer pile this hyer old polar b'ar wull do his best. An' ef I'm ter be boss, I'll begin ther ring performance by givin' a few orders. Let no man leave camp, 'cept I say so, under penalty o' gittin' his skull blowed. Let no man go over ter ther t'other side, under penalty o' death. Let no man try ter run this hyar concert privilege, without my permission, or hev nothin' ter say in ther way o' bossin'."

"But I demand a guard of men to accompany me to my office, to rescue the money I have there," John Metcalf protested, importantly.

"Can't help what ye demand," Old Somersault said. "You're no better'n ther rest o' ther boys, an' et won't do no good fer ye ter be obstreperous. I forbid any man leavin' camp till I know et's safe—an' as fer yer money, et ain't no better'n any other folks'."

Metcalf didn't appear to assent to this view, and moved about growling protests against the scout's arbitrary rules, and endeavoring to enlist the sympathies of some of the men, on his side.

But as he was no general favorite, he had no success, and had to content himself with his own opinion.

About an hour after midnight Old Somersault gave orders for everything to be kept quiet in the camp, and left on a tour of reconnaissance about the settlement.

When he returned, he reported the town still in an uproar from the fact that the ruffians had seized upon the liquors in the saloons, and were having a good drunk and occasional fights, among themselves.

They had, however thrown out a number of pickets, to prevent a surprise, and a third of their number patrolled the main street, prepared to repel any attack, while their companions were enjoying the delights of Bacchus.

Shortly after Somersault's return to camp, a picket came in, and reported a single horseman outside the lines, who claimed to be a stranger, and wished to enter the camp.

"Show him in," the old scout ordered.

The horseman soon came riding into camp, and drew rein in front of the principal fire, around which the majority of the defenders were clustered.

He was a well-dressed person of some fifty-five or sixty years of age, and evidently a man above the common herd. He wore a long iron-gray beard, and a stylish Derby hat; his face was large, well cast and noble in expression; his eyes and hair were of a dark brown color. A large diamond pin shone upon his shirt front.

"Is the sheriff or principal officer of this district to be found about here?" he inquired, as he reined in his horse.

"Well, I reckon we never had a sheriff yet," Old Somersault replied, "but, as I've been

chosen ter represent this hyar division o' ther townspeople, I presume ye might term me an officer. Up in town, I allow, Arizona Mike calkylates he's boss o' ther roost. Ye see, we're split up now, an' stan' as two belligerent parties, an' one or t'other of us intends ter run the shebang, ultimately. At present the roughs hev got the possession of the coops, but we don't opine they're goin' ter hev et fer any length o' time."

"Ah! then there is but little hope of my getting assistance, I judge," the stranger replied.

"What assistance d'ye want?" Somersault asked.

"Help from honest men to recover my lost child, sir," was the reply. "I will introduce myself to you as the Duke of Leigh, of Sussex, England. In company with my daughter, Lady Myra, I have been traveling through Western America for pleasure, and partly in the interests of English railway investors. This afternoon, while myself and daughter, with our attendant, were riding toward this place, we were set upon in the mountains by a band of brigands, our attendant killed, myself robbed, and my daughter carried off. I was then set at liberty, and told that when I paid over the sum of five thousand dollars my daughter would be returned to me."

"Well, I allow ye refused?" Somersault said, with a chuckle.

"Most assuredly I did. The demand is outrageous, and I do not propose to yield to it," the duke replied.

"Then, I dare say, you'll not be very likely ter see yer progeny ag'in, very soon," Somersault declared. "The gal, Crack-Shot, does bizness on ther dead certain plan, an' thar's them as say she never fails. Ef she's got yer gal, about ther likeliest thing you kin do is fork over ther cash, as she's firmly planted in the mountings, an' ye might as well try ter trap ther American eagle as her."

"But I will call upon the government for aid."

"Waal, thet might do, but et's hard stirrin' up these Uncle Samites, bet yer boots! They don't enthuse wuth a cent, when they're out arter road-agents, an' ten ter one ye'd hev ter slip a heap o' hundred-dollar Williams inter their hands afore they'd wake ter any interest in yer case at all."

"My Heaven! Is there no law in this country, then?"

"Dead loads of et, stranger, but et ain't ginerally observed up in this country. Home-made laws is ther thing, hyarabouts—every man fer hisself, and ther Old Boy fer 'em all. Ef Crack-Shot sez money, or no gal, ye kin calculate et's gospel, an' we ken't hinder et, 'cause I opine ther boys hev all hed a deal wi' her, one way an' another, an' got the worst of it; hence, they consider et safe ter fight shy of her ladyship."

The duke slid from his saddle, with an exclamation of disappointment.

"If it is as you say, I may as well stop here, for the present, with your permission, until I can find a way of rescuing her."

"Purty good plan, an' you're welcome, so long's you behave yourself," the old scout assented. It was rather an odd invitation, perhaps, but it always was his rule never to make much of any one until he had made a study of them.

The duke accordingly rolled himself in a blanket and lay down a short distance from the fire, and a little in the rear of the other campers, apparently not over-anxious to mix with them.

Toward the latter part of the night the camp became silent, from the fact that all were evidently wrapt in slumber.

It was about this time that the speculator, John Metcalf, arose from his position among the sleepers and stole softly toward the reclining-place of the duke, who was reposing more serenely than one would have supposed him capable of doing, considering his recent loss.

Stooping beside him, Metcalf shook him gently by the arm.

With a start, the duke opened his eyes and attempted to rise, but the speculator held him back.

"'Sh! Not a loud word, for your life," he warned. "You are in deadly peril, although you may not know it. Do you recognize me?"

"No," the nobleman replied.

"Humph! Your memory must be mighty forgetful," the other growled, evidently not pleased. "Don't you remember your confidential clerk, Metcalf, whom you made it warm for a dozen years ago, because he had not the audacity to steal a few of your many dollars?"

The duke started.

"Ah! true enough. I see the resemblance now. What are you doing here, sir?"

"I've been getting rich, of late, and endeavoring to heal up the wound you made in my affection for Lady Myra, by making it necessary for me to leave England."

"You are a scoundrel! Let me up!"

"Of course I am a scoundrel," Metcalf replied, triumphantly, allowing the nobleman to rise. "But not so bad a one as not to be willing to help an old and esteemed friend when I find him in trouble."

"Bah! Leigh scoffed. "Poor assistance I should expect from you."

"Nevertheless, you do me great injustice," Metcalf replied. "Just step this way out of earshot, and we will compare notes."

The Englishman did follow the speculator, although evidently distrustful of him.

Beyond the camp both halted, and faced each other.

"Now proceed with whatever you have to say!" the duke ordered.

"I will do so," Metcalf replied. "In the first place, you are in a strange country, and in trouble. How much money have you?"

"None!" was the gloomy reply. "The brigands robbed me of what I had."

"Then you have no money to redeem your child?"

"None, whatever."

"That is bad. If you do not pay over the ransom in ten days, she will be sold to the Indians!"

"Heavens! You don't mean it."

"But I do. There is an old Indian nabob, just over in Indian Territory, who buys up female captives for his wigwam, and Crack-Shot gets paid a good price for such as she don't see fit to hand over to her men."

"This is terrible. What can be done? It would kill me to have my peerless child given up to such a fate."

"That is the part I am coming to," Metcalf assumed. "I can agree with you that it will be best to get possession of her at once. This you cannot do alone, and—"

"I can secure your services by paying for them," the duke sneered, anticipating what was coming.

"Exactly. I am willing to let by-gones be by-gones, and look only into the future. I am the only man in Durango who has money and power enough to get the girl away from the brigands. Then, as a reward, I should want to marry her. One of these days she will inherit a grand English property from her grandfather, and who wouldn't consider that attractive? In the mean time, after we are married, we'll content ourselves by touring this country, at my expense, which I am willing to bear, for the sake of being the husband of a duchess, where formerly I was your lackey. Oh! I'm wide-awake, you see! Accept and all will be lovely—refuse, and I'll guarantee you'll never see the lovely Lady Myra again!"

CHAPTER V.

INTO THE JAWS OF DEATH.

LET us return to Gipsy Jack, and the girl road-agent.

She was just of medium hight of women, and possessed of the most perfectly graceful figure Jack remembered ever to have seen, which was displayed to advantage in a neat-fitting

suit of pink and blue colored fabric, with a jaunty slouch hat upon her head, and knee-boots upon her feet of a small light pattern.

A belt about her waist contained a pair of silver-plated revolvers, and a knife-hilt protruded from a sheath which hung upon her hip.

In face she was decidedly fresh and fair, with sweetly chiseled features and expressive dark eyes, while her hair fell in a mass of natural curls upon her shoulders.

She was far too pretty a person to occupy the position she did, and she was evidently conscious of her beauty, as she gave her hat a somewhat jauntier pitch, and rearranged her collar, as the brigand drew rein, and she came up.

An expression of admiration entered her eyes as she saw Gipsy Jack. Few finer-looking men than he in that wild country.

"Well, you got him, I see!" the Girl Brigand said.

"Yes ma'm," was the reply.

"Well, you may release his feet, that I may take him to my council-chamber to interview him," she said.

The bandit obeyed.

"You may follow me," the young woman said, leading the way through the fissure in the rock to a large cavern, which seemed by its size as if the whole inside of the peak were hollow.

In the center was a large raised dais, some ten feet in height, with steps leading to the top.

Upon the top of this was a rude easy-chair, while upon the ground in front, were a number of bench-seats.

Motioning Gipsy Jack to be seated upon one of these, the girl captain seated herself upon the second step of the platform, and faced him, with a searching glance.

"Well, Deadwood Dick, how does your sudden change of base agree with you?" she asked.

Gipsy Jack started. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Just what I asked—how do you fancy your change of base?"

"Not at all. But you addressed me as Deadwood Dick?"

"Because I thought it would be more natural to you than Gipsy Jack. Oh! you needn't deny that you're Deadwood Dick, for I happen to know better!"

"How did you acquire your information?"

"Oh! quite easily enough. I saw you as Deadwood Dick about a month ago, and once seen, you are not to be mistaken for any other man."

Gipsy Jack started, and his features grew somewhat sterner.

"Admitting that I am, as you say, Deadwood Dick," he said, "I begin to awaken to something I had not thought of before. You say you saw me a month ago. It was just that length of time ago, that I lost the dearest treasure of my latter life—that my wife, who was ruthlessly stolen from my very arms as it were, and borne away to some place unknown to me, and for a purpose equally unknown. Perhaps you can tell me where she is."

"Were I disposed to be merciless, I could—but as I would not break your heart, I prefer not to tell you."

"What! do you mean to insinuate that she was not true to me?"

"Well, if you must know—yes. With my band of men, I was roaming in your vicinity, about a month ago, when one day my lieutenant suddenly came up missing. Careful inquiry failed to discover him, and then came the news that your wife had also turned up missing and was not to be found. Remembering that while we were prowling near your shanty, my lieutenant had seen you and your wife sitting in the doorway, and expressed a strong admiration for her, I naturally concluded that he had induced her to elope with him."

"Bah! I do not believe this," Gipsy Jack—as we shall still continue to call him—said

sternly. "No amount of lies could ever serve to convince me that Calamity was faithless to me."

"Ha! ha! You've a great deal of confidence in her, I see. I fancy you little understand a woman's heart. It is a fickle piece of mechanism, and easily attracted from one point to another."

"Perhaps that may be the case with yours, but not so with Calamity Jane. I believe you have her in your power, as a prisoner!"

"Well, I suppose I may as well admit the truth of your charge," she said, with an indulgent laugh. "I, Captain Crack-Shot, chief of the Knights of the Colorados, have the honor of holding as my prisoner, the wife of the notorious ex-road-agent, Deadwood Dick, subject to release on certain terms. I didn't know but I could deaden your interest in her, and capture your affection, myself. Ha! ha! ha!"

"I comprehended your plan at the first!" Jack replied. "It failed from the fact that I care only for one woman, and that woman the one who has been true to me, through thick and thin—Calamity Jane!"

"And that very extraordinary affection you seem to cherish for her was the cause of my having her abducted and brought here, as I dared to presume you would be willing to pay quite a respectable sum for her release!" the girl bandit replied. "I was upon the eve of writing you when I heard of your arrival in Durango, and concluded that I could best arrange with you by having you brought hither."

"Well, what do you propose to do?"

"I propose to have you accede to my terms," she replied, decidedly.

"You seem very confident," he said, a faint smile playing over his face. "You perhaps don't fully know me."

"On the contrary, I know you better than most people. Do you remember the old Spaniard who used to run the Casino La Pierre, in Deadwood? If so, you will perhaps also recollect that he had a daughter who sometimes handled the paste-boards expertly, and thereby tempted sundry dollars into the parental treasury?"

"Ah! I see. I have been turning the thought over in my mind that I had seen you somewhere. You are old Carlo's daughter?"

"The same, but lately transformed into Captain Crack-Shot—the title given me because of certain ability in the line of straight shooting. Hence, you see, I have seen you long ago, and heard so much of you that I have been able to make a pretty accurate estimate of your character. I am full well aware that you are considered a hard man to buck against, but I am not afraid but what I can bring you to terms in case you become balky."

Gipsy Jack surveyed the woman in no little wonderment. His long experience in the golden West as Deadwood Dick had brought him into contact with many strange characters of the feminine sex, but he had seldom met a girl so young in years who was such a self-possessed villain and schemer.

"I have serious doubts as to your success in taming me," he replied. "I don't generally yield to any one, and presume I shall not break my rule in your favor."

"But I presume you will, as you can have but two alternatives to select from, one of which is—death. Listen, however, and I will tell you my plan, which I think you will embrace when you know it."

"Since coming to this section I admitted an old witch to my band who owns a great share of the flats near Durango, and in particular the claim you pitched your camp on. This witch having disappeared, and I believing she is dead, I propose to claim the flats as my own by right of heritage. In order to get possession, I shall have to fight for it, and I want you to take a hand in the struggle as my first lieutenant. If we win you shall share equally with me in the profits; if we fail we will share such toll as can be obtained in the usual line of my business. Of course, when you take the oath of allegiance,

your wife shall be returned to you, and all will be well."

"And if I refuse?"

"Well, then that will be another thing. You'll get a just reward for your foolishness. Your wife, Calamity Jane, will be sold to Thunder Cloud, the red-skin nabob, for a thousand dollars. You will then be forced to pay five times that amount for your liberty, or be shot by my sergeant and thrown from the shelf outside into the gulch over three hundred feet below. How like you the prospectus?"

"It is quite novel and entertaining; you should have a medal for your ready invention," was the defiant answer. "You had better call your sergeant at once, as I shall surely refuse to accede to your plans."

"You do not mean it."

"Decidedly, yes. I am not inclined to re-enter the ranks of road-agency again, and, were I, I should do so on my own account. I am no cutthroat."

Captain Crack-Shot evidently was not pleased at this decision, and rose and walked about upon the steps of the dais.

"Perhaps you think I am jesting," she said; "perhaps you do not believe I will do, or cause to be done, a thing I have threatened?"

"No. On the contrary, I believe you will do as you threaten."

"And in face of this, you mean that you would rather have me fulfill my threats than to accede to my proposition?"

"Exactly. Threaten even to bring the skies crashing down upon my head, and you could not budge me from my resolve."

"Then I'll give you the hospitality of the 'den' until I can send word to the Indian reservation for Thunder-Cloud to come and purchase your wife, for whom he has a great admiration. Thomas!"

At her call a young Spaniard approached, and stood in waiting.

"Thomas, take the prisoner and lower him into the den with the others!" she said. "Go, Sir Gipsy, and consider yourself in luck that I don't shoot you on the spot."

"I am ever so much obliged," Jack sarcastically retorted, as he suffered himself to be led away.

From the main cave he was taken into a smaller one, divided by skin curtains from the larger one, and from this out upon a shelf on the mountain-side, which was an exact counterpart of the one upon the opposite side of the honey comb peak.

Just in front of this ledge was a deep, cellar-like space, surrounded on the other three sides by perpendicular, smooth, rocky walls, up which no mortal could climb without a ladder or other artificial aid.

The bottom of this natural hole was about forty feet in diameter, and in the center was built a strong walled cage, or cell. This was about twenty by thirty in size, leaving an area running entirely around it.

The walls of this cage or den were fully twenty feet high, and perfectly smooth.

The depth of the cellar from the ledge above was at least forty feet, and there was no apparent outlet to it, except by upward ascent.

A more effective or novel prison could scarcely be imagined, for in the area lurked several wild animals, among which were two or three wolves and a cinnamon bear.

From the howls they sent up, it was only too evident they were purposely kept in a half-starved condition, and should a prisoner succeed in escaping from the den to the open space, he would only fall into their ravenous jaws.

A strong crane or derrick had been erected upon the ledge, and provided with a rope and tackles, so that a person could be easily lowered or raised from the pit.

As they emerged upon the ledge, Gipsy Jack took in all these points in swift glances. Then he allowed the Spaniard to fasten a kind of strap harness to his shoulders and waist and hook the tackle into it, well knowing that should he resist there were those at hand who would shoot him down at a signal. His only hope was

escape from the pit, wherein he surmised the other prisoners were kept, for down in the den he saw three persons—two women and a man.

"Ready!" the Spaniard said; then he swung him out from the ledge and began to lower him.

Down!—down he went, slowly at first, but soon the Spaniard gave a yell; the rope had parted, and down! down! went Gipsy Jack—not into the den where the other prisoners were confined, but into the area, where the ferocious beasts were awaiting to receive him, with gleaming eyes and distended jaws.

What fate could be his except a horrible death?

CHAPTER VI. A BATTLE ROYAL.

To John Metcalf's infamous scheme the duke did not give immediate answer, but paced to and fro like a lion in its cage.

"You are the greatest villain I have ever met," he finally said. "You see me in trouble and take advantage of my situation to propose a rascally piece of business, which none but an adept scoundrel could conceive!"

"And yet I am no more of a villain than you!" Metcalf declared, triumphantly. "When I, your confidential clerk, had dared to fall in love with your daughter, Lady Myra, who, like yourself, was over-proud of an unmoneyed title, you discharged me, threatened to horse-whip me if I persisted, and finding that was not likely to have the desired effect, you fixed my case by purporting to have lost a couple of thousand pounds—which you know you were not worth—and accusing me of the theft. You were liberal enough, however, to offer me my liberty in case I forever left Great Britain, and rather than vex my eyes by peering through iron grates, I skipped, leaving my love behind me. So you see you are not the most conscientious Christian living."

"Well, admitting that," he said, "you could scarcely blame me. Lady Myra is of proud old English blood, allied to the royal line, and no sane person could censure me for not bearing to her marriage with the son of a common laborer."

"Yet, just at present, I am rich enough to buy up any amount of titles, while you'd probably be glad to dispense with yours for a few thousand pounds sterling, that you might redeem your daughter."

"No, sir, my title is a proud one, and is not for sale!" the duke replied, haughtily. "True, I am temporarily poor, but I am still the Duke of Leigh, and a gentleman of position in my own country."

"The dodge won't work here. Ye can't sling on no mi-lord swag, nor refuse to allow every galoot is your equal, if you don't want to get systematically smashed. But, what do you say to my proposition?"

"I will not consent to it, for even if I were to give my child away to you, I have yet to know for certain that you can get her from the brigands."

"Oh! that would be an easy matter. I chance to know this Captain Crack-Shot, quite intimately, and when I offer her a reasonable sum, she will for my sake, deliver up the Lady Myra. But, were you to consent to this nothing can be done toward it, just at present. The two elements in this place are at war, and one or the other must get whipped before peace can be restored. The roughs have got the town, and under any other than a bad management, they would rule the gulches, and flats and town, hereabouts, for all time to come."

"Under their present management, however, they will soon be driven forth from the held they have got, and these fellows you see here will have possession; I'd much rather that the ruffians have possession, as I can work myself into their graces, and obtain their captaincy—in fact, have about everything in my own hands, which would net me exceeding profit."

"But how do you know you can get in with this other party?"

"I am pretty certain that I can, from the fact that it would gratify them to obtain one of the citizens' best men, which I may be considered, as I have been prominent in local affairs, before."

"And so you would desert the good cause for the bad in order to obtain power?" the duke demanded, in astonishment.

"Even so. And I am going to make the trial to-night. If you value your future, and that of Lady Myra, you will do well to join me. Refuse, and when I get into power, I'll cause you to repent it."

"Then, lead ahead! As you have it all in your own hands, it is probably useless for me to resist your will."

"Good! I am glad to see you so sensible. Follow me as cautiously as is in your power, and we will make our escape from the camp. Never mind your horse; that can be obtained some other time."

Then, the speculator led cautiously off through the darkness, followed by the duke, who could see no other way of regaining possession of Lady Myra, than to follow Metcalf's guidance, as the hopes of her rescue as received from Old Somersault, were anything but flattering.

Let us return to Gipsy Jack.

As he went downward, a cry of alarm burst from his lips.

Fortunately, he was not over twenty feet from the bottom when the rope parted, and accordingly when he landed he was but slightly stunned.

Almost at the instant of his reaching the bottom, a large, keen-edged knife dropped in front of him. It had been hurled down by the terrified Spaniard for his defense.

This sudden fall into their quarters, had caused the beasts to scamper away a short distance, where they stood regarding him in sullen surprise, and uttering angry growls.

It would be but a moment ere they would pounce upon him.

So, grasping the knife, he prepared for the struggle which he knew must come.

And he was not an instant too soon.

The next minute the bear reared upon its hind feet with a ferocious growl, and lumbered forward, its front paws outstretched to encompass Jack in a deadly hug. Directly in its rear followed the wolves, ready to participate in the affray.

Jack awaited, with a terrible expression of resolve upon his face.

On came the huge bear, with distended jaws and lolling tongue. Standing braced, ready for work, Deadwood Dick fastened his glance upon the gleaming orbs of the monster, and held the knife ready for use.

On came the bear, until his breath almost fanned Jack's cheek; then he paused, and stood glaring down upon his human adversary, but not offering him harm.

This stage in the exciting drama was just what Jack had been waiting for, and he felt sure it would come.

With his all-powerful mind-gaze he had mesmerized the brute, whose muscular strength was a hundredfold more powerful than his mental power.

The next instant he uttered a shout, and springing forward, he drove his stout blade with unerring aim and a strong blow into the bear's eye. The brain was penetrated, and with an almost human cry, the great monster of the mountain toppled backward to the ground, dead.

Frightened at this sudden turn of affairs, the wolves scampered back a few yards, with howls.

Securing his knife, Jack awaited the onset of the wolves, whom he well knew would soon come for him in a sneaking way.

Glancing upward he saw several persons peering over the cliff, among whom was Crack-Shot.

"Stop! don't kill any more of these ani-

mals!" she cried. "We will get another rope, and lower it down to you."

"Oh! you needn't mind. I prefer to give these beasts dead away before I get through with them. You needn't fret about me," Jack retorted.

"But I command you not to harm them; I do not want them slaughtered, I tell you!" she replied, angrily.

"That's the very reason I prefer to clean 'em out," Jack shouted back. "They're too hungry to live!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, however, when the biggest wolf crouched back with an angry snarl, and leaped toward him.

Most men would have been appalled at the fearful attack, but Jack was not.

Darting quickly out of the path of the animal, as the body shot past him, he reached forth that merciless knife, and the point entered the wolf's neck; the keen blade almost severed the head from the body, which summarily disposed of this case.

"Ha! ha!" Jack shouted, waving his hand up at the astounded brigands, triumphantly. "Send down some more wild tigers and elephants, if you have any!"

Then he made for the other brutes, but terrified by the fate of their companions, they all took to their heels, and there was a lively race around the alley, with Jack now the assailant instead of the defender.

With that same skill in hurling a knife which he had often before displayed, as Deadwood Dick, he now poised his blade and hurled it after the fleeing beasts, and thus soon finished off the menagerie.

To his surprise, on glancing up to the ledge, he perceived that none of the brigands were in view now.

"Wonder what sent them away?" he muttered. "It must be that something has scared them."

He accordingly began to cast about him for some means of getting over into the inner den, where the prisoners were confined.

After some study he hit upon a plan that promised success.

The part of the rope that had accompanied him into the pit was some forty or fifty feet long, and one end of it contained the tackle-hook which had been hooked to the harness around his waist.

If he could toss this hooked end up, so that it would catch on top of the inner den wall, thirty feet above, he could pull himself up, so that he could look down upon the other prisoners.

So he at once began experimenting in the matter.

The first few times trying he missed, and the hook came back, but, at last, the hook caught upon the top of the wall and held; then he climbed hand over hand up the rope, and finally landed upon the top of the wall.

Gazing down into the dungeon, he beheld Calamity Jane, another young woman of about her size and age, and a young man of rather dashing appearance.

"Oh! Dick! Dick!" Calamity cried, as she saw her hero. "Have you come to rescue me?"

"Well, that depends on how successful I am, Janie!" he replied. "I've just laid out the animals toward it."

"Oh! Dick—look out! look out!" she suddenly screamed—but too late!

A lasso noose suddenly settled and tightened about his shoulders, and he was hauled swiftly upward to the ledge, where a dozen masked brigands were not slow in taking him into custody and binding his hands.

"Ha! ha! I thought I'd not let you enjoy the society of your wife," Captain Crack-Shot said, with triumph. "I've made up my mind you shall be mine, willing or unwilling."

"Bah! do you imagine you could ever be aught to me?" he sneered.

"But I will force you to be. For the present you will be tied to a stake on the other ledge, and plenty of combustible material piled around

you. To-night will expire by seeing the stuff lighted, and you will have a chance to swear allegiance to me forever—or burn. Boys, away with him!"

The brigands accordingly marched him through the mountain cave to the other side, and out upon the plateau, where a heavy post had been fixed in place.

To this he was securely lashed, and a heap of leaves, twigs and pine cones piled about his feet.

Then the brigands marched away again, and he was left alone.

Just as the first streaks of dawn began to appear in the horizon he saw Crack-Shot advance from the cave with a lighted torch in her hand, and he knew things were drawing to a focus. Either he must humor her wishes, or there was a fair prospect of his being roasted. Which should he choose: the fire or the female brigand?

CHAPTER VII.

THE OLD FOX IN A TRAP—JACK TRUE-SOUL.

WITHOUT difficulty Metcalf and the duke succeeded in escaping from the camp, and, once outside the picket lines, hurried across the flats swiftly until challenged by the sentinels of the opposing party.

"Halt! who comes there?" the sentry cried, snapping his gun-lock. "Who comes, an' what d'ye want?"

"It's me, Metcalf, and a friend," the speculator cried. "We got away from Somersault's gang and want to join you."

"Then, stan' where ye are, 'til I send fer Arizona Abe. He's boss o' sech matters," the man replied, and the deserters had no choice left but to remain in the gloom until the aforesaid Abraham should appear.

It was not long before the guard was heard coming back, however.

"Reckon et's all right," he cried. "Ther captain is dead drunk, nigh-about—so I spoke ter some o' ther other boys, an' they allowed it was all right. So ye kin go on inter town."

Accordingly Metcalf made haste to accept of the invitation, such as it was, and he and the duke hurried up the slope into the town, where not the same quiet prevailed as there did down in the citizens' camp on the flats.

From each house and saloon came sounds that bespoke the power of "bug-juice"—angry shouts and oaths, shouts of laughter, or roars of Bacchanalian song, as the case might be.

Men were staggering through the street, and in some cases fighting with each other, and the whole place seemed in a state of demoralization.

Metcalf was a shrewd man.

He knew the worth of the maxim, "Strike while the iron is hot," and accordingly he mounted an empty barrel in front of the Old Bourbon establishment, and began to yell at the top of his lungs and gesticulate wildly, which action had the desired effect, for he soon had quite an audience gathered around him, and more still coming.

"Hurrah! hurrah! this way, fellow-citizens, if you want to hear something to your advantage!" he cried. "I am here in your behalf, and I want you one and all to listen to me."

"Waal, go ahead!" one of the more sober roughs retorted. "Ef ye've got anything fer us ter know, jest speel et out, on short notice."

"I have news!" Metcalf cried, continuing to gesticulate. "You are all in deadly peril, and I come to warn you, and take my place at your head and lead you on to victory, if you are willing. I know the plans of the enemy. Are you willing to adopt me as your leader, fellow-citizens? Let every man speak up!"

There was a murmur of assent from a number, but the majority did not take to the idea. Metcalf had never been a favorite, because of his facility of getting hold of claims and then raising the price of them above the reach of the poorer class.

"I don't allow we all tumble ter thet racket," one chap asserted. "Arizona Abe is my favorite, an' I reckon most o' these boys an' me is too."

"Bah! Arizona Abe is not fit to lead you!" the speculator declared. "I hear he is at present dead drunk. Supposing an attack should occur, just now—what kind of a leader would you have? I tell you I am the proper man. My friend, here, an English duke, is a military man, and will act as my lieutenant. As I first stated, you are in imminent danger, despite the fact that you have possession of the town. The party on the flats have determined to have control of the surrounding district, and to that end, have sent a courier to the mountains to enlist Captain Crack-Shot and her bandits, into their service. If they succeed, the sooner you pack up and leave, the safer it will be for you, as they can easily clean you out, when you have such a sucker of a leader as Arizona Abe would make you."

"Hillo! whar's ther ornary galoot as durst call Arizona Abe a sucker? Whar is he?—let me luk at him!" shouted a big, strapping mountaineer, with an ugly looking physiognomy, who came staggering up just in time to overhear a part of Metcalf's harangue. "Whar's ther man as durst asseverate thet I, Abraham from Arizona, ain't ther high-cock-o'-lorum o' this convention—ther hero o' Bull Run—ther sharp-spurred American Eagle o' Liberty?"

"It was I, friend Arizona, who was just remarking that a love of liquor incapacitated you for duty as the leader of the boys, here, and I was willing to fill your place!" Metcalf said, moderating matters in order not to get into trouble with the ruffian, if it was to be avoided. "Of course you would then have more time to indulge, and—"

"Thet ain't ther question afore this hyar court!" Arizona declared, swinging himself as if ready for a fight. "Sum one called me a sucker, an' thet's the werry patient I'm arter. Whar is he? Show me ther two-legged reptile thet dared ter compare me, ther hero o' Bingen on ther Rhine, ter a common fish, no matter ef et be bull-head, mullet, or sucker. He's my meat—that man!"

"Et was Metcalf who called ye a sucker?" one of the miners shouted.

"Oho! se et was you, was it? You had ther audacity ter insult me, did ye?" Abraham from Arizona howled, waltzing nearer to the barrel whereon Metcalf was perched. "Oh! jest wait till I get hold of ye!"

"Hold! Don't get angry, friend Abraham," the speculator said, beginning to get alarmed. "I meant not insult, sir—I simply meant to imply that of beer you were a great sucker, as well as of sundry other kinds of drink, and it would be a pity to interrupt your right to imbibe on this occasion, so I offered to fill your place!"

"Ye war mighty anxious, warn't ye, ter help matters along, in yer own favor? No, sir-ee, John Metcalf, ye can't boss this hyar roost, wile Arizona Abe's around. Eh, boys?"

"Kerect! Arizona suits us!" was the cry of a majority of the surrounding roughs.

"Well, if this is the case, I pity you, and predict your ultimate destruction by the enemy!" Metcalf said, both disappointed and chagrined at his failure. "Therefore, not wishing to get killed, I will return to the flats, and act as a spy among the enemy in order to report to you when there is any danger."

"Waal, I guess not," Abraham of Arizona declared, drawing and cocking a revolver. "Ye ain't er-goin' ter do nothin' o' ther kind. Now thet ye've paid us ther honor of a wizzet, we're not goin' ter let ye go back ter t'other party till we've utilized yer ter our own purpose as much as poserbul. Don't make no try ter escape, or I'll bore a drift thru yer head, w'at'll let out any brains ye may hev stored up thar."

"What have I done, gentlemen, to merit this treatment?" Metcalf demanded, now more alarmed than before. "Am I not offering my services in your behalf—am I not willing to do anything and everything in behalf of your interests? Pray! what have I done to offend?"

"Yas, you're too mighty willin'," the Arizona growled. "We kin read ye like a book."

wi' our spectickles off, pilgrim. Ye'd mighty like to be boss o' ther roost, hyarabouts, so ye c'u'd shove in a speculative finger, but et kent be did. Et won't work. Et won't wash. You're a bloated aristocrat, and not uv our kind. You've got ter disgorge. Thar's money up in yer office, ther boys say, an' you've got ter hand et over, fer divvy among ther boys."

"By Heaven, no! You shall not rob me in this way!"

"But we shall. Get down off'm thet bar'l, and march straight ter ther office, in front o' my revolver, an' get ther scrip and hard cash, or off goes yer head, in less time than et takes ter count sixty-seven!"

No disputing that "business" was on hand, and as Metcalf gazed around him he noted that nearly every one seemed to assent to Abraham's order.

Let us return to the mountain plateau, just as day was beginning to break in the east.

The face of Deadwood Dick—or Gipsy Jack, as we know him, in this romance—was stern and passive, as he saw Captain Crack-Shot approaching, with the ignited torch.

Unmovable resolve was expressed both upon his handsome face, and in his eyes, which flashed fearlessly.

The face of the Girl Brigand wore a peculiar triumphant smile, as she came up, and flashed the light of the torch before his face.

"Ha! ha! the ex-road-agent has changed his mind, by this time, has he not?" she said, with sarcasm. "Oh! I thought you'd come around to time, Sir Gipsy Jack! rather than fry, roast and turn to ashes."

"Then you reckoned wrongly!" the prisoner replied. "I have not the least idea of changing my mind."

"Possible? Well, really, your pluck is admirable—in fact, I see more and more reason, every minute, why you should fill a position as my lieutenant. Such men as you are not picked up, every day."

"It is perhaps better for the country that they are not," Jack replied, with a faint smile. "A few less of my class, and a few more of your artistic merit, would no doubt place the country on a more solid footing."

"I appreciate your satire," she said, flushing; "but business is business, and my terms are unchanged. When I decide upon accomplishing an object, I do it regardless of every obstacle. I have set my heart upon uniting you with my band, and I will do it, or kill you, even if it brings down the wrath of the heavens upon my head. Tell me, now, will you become a member of my band, and swear eternal allegiance to that band?"

"Emphatically, no!—decidedly, once and for all, no!" Jack replied, without hesitation.

"But, consider what you are saying. If you refuse, I myself will light this material around your feet, and you will be roasted alive. Do you comprehend what excruciating agony such a death would bring you? Surely you are not foolish enough to endure it, when you can just as well have life and liberty."

"I have given my decision; Deadwood Dick never chaws back his words!" was the composed answer.

Even the merciless Spanish girl was astounded.

That any man could coolly face a death so horrible as she had promised, when liberty was offered, surpassed even her comprehension.

But her determination to conquer him became the stronger.

"Then shall your obstinacy recoil upon your own head," she said. "I shall now light these fagots, and retire into the cave, as I am not eager to witness your torture. I shall, however, be within hearing, and if you shout 'Help!' I will understand that you have had enough of the bake, and decided to come to my terms, and will then rescue you."

"You will listen in vain," Jack retorted.

"We shall see!" and with the words she ignited the rubbish in several places, and then turned and hurried away into the cavern.

CHAPTER VIII.

SKIP TO THE RESCUE — WAITING FOR THE STRUGGLE.

THE blaze began to catch from one leaf and twig to another, and increase in volume. The expression of Jack's countenance was stern and unyielding.

The flames spread, and crept upward; soon they would singe his bootlegs, and buckskin breeches; then would come the actual torture of fire.

Should he still resist, and defy human agony? Or should he yield the day, admitting Crack-Shot the conqueror, and give himself up to a wild life in her employ?

Then, too, Calamity was a prisoner; should he perish in this awful manner, what would be her terrible fate? Sold to the red Mormon, Thunder Cloud!

The thought filled him with greater alarm than his own peril. But his heart gave a great bound, for at this moment came to his ears a familiar whinny; he heard heavy footsteps, and a moment later a horse trotted out upon the plateau!

An irrepressible cry of joy escaped the prisoner. It was his sagacious dog, Skip, mounted upon his own faithful steed—come to his rescue!

The dog leaped to the ground, with a low whine of recognition.

"Good dog!" welcomed Jack. "Drag the brush away, Skip! Quick, sir!"

Skip seemed gifted with almost human sagacity and intelligence, for without hesitation he seized hold of the underlying brush of the combustible pile, and hauled it back from before Jack, taking with it the largest portion of the burning leaves and cones, and Jack was out of peril, so far as the fire was concerned, in a few moments.

"Good boy, Skip!" he said, approvingly. "Now, if you can gnaw this rope which binds me, I'll be all hunk. Can you do it?"

The dog wagged his tail knowingly, and apparently understanding exactly what was required, set to work on the job.

It was no easy one, however, as might be supposed. The rope was of twisted hide, but Skip's teeth were sharp as knives, and the rope was bitten in twain in a moment; then, seizing the dangling end, he began to trot around the stake and unwind it.

Every second seemed an hour to Gipsy Jack, literally, for he momentarily expected to see Crack-Shot emerge from the cavern; but luck was in his favor, and, thanks be to his canine companion, he stood freed from the stake in less than a minute's time.

His hands were not free, but that was a matter of little importance, as he could escape with them bound.

A couple of bounds and a spring upward placed him on the back of the beautiful white horse; then the dog followed his example, and a single low-spoken word caused the horse to wheel and dash from the plateau, and as he disappeared, Jack gave vent to a piercing war-whoop.

Away down the winding, rugged mountain path his sure-footed steed bore him, at break-neck speed, until he uttered a peculiar cry, and the horse wheeled abruptly to the right into a pocket in the side of the mountain, and came to a halt in the midst of its thick verdure.

"Silence now, my faithful friends," the fugitive said. "If pursuit is given, we must allow the brigands to pass us; then we must go back and see what can be done toward rescuing Calamity and the other prisoners."

He had not long to wait, for quickly there came the sound of horses' feet, approaching from up the trail, and a few moments later a large body of the brigands dashed past the mouth of the pocket at a gallop, like avenging phantoms of the night.

How many there were Jack could not count, but judged there were at least twenty, and, what was more, there were two women in the party!

Was one of them Calamity?

Possibly it was she and the other prisoners; but the question was, how had they been hoisted from the pit and mounted in the short space of time that had intervened between the discovery of Jack's escape and that moment?

"I must know the truth, before I leave this vicinity," Jack said. "If they really were Calamity and the other prisoners, then Crack-Shot is up to some other deviltry. She either has some other hiding-place in view, or is going to join forces with the party in Durango!"

Waiting until the brigands were out of hearing, he dismounted, left the horse in the concealment, and, accompanied by the dog, hurried up the trail toward the ledge.

His hands were now free, thanks to Skip's ability in picking knots, and Richard was himself again!

Arriving upon the ledge, he boldly entered the cave, first equipping himself with a burning knot from his recent funeral pyre.

The bandits' cave was dark and deserted, as he surmised it would be.

But all their loose property was still there, and equipping himself with both revolvers and a good knife for emergencies he passed through to the other side, and out upon the other ledge; then he cast the burning torch down into the den.

It was empty of its former occupants!

It was now apparent to him that the two women he had seen with the brigands, were Calamity and the other young lady whom he had seen in the den, whoever she might be.

"It puzzles me what's the row—why the brigands are leaving this admirable retreat?" he muttered, as he retraced his footsteps to where he had left his horse. "There must be some cause for the sudden evacuation. Maybe on discovering my escape, Miss Crack-Shot concluded this wouldn't be a healthy hang-out with me at liberty, and so took French leave. If she had only been thoughtful enough to have left Calamity behind, I shouldn't be so much concerned."

When he arrived where he had left the horse, he remounted, as did Skip, and set out down the trail, slowly, and looking out on either hand with expectation of an ambush and attack.

But, good luck willed it otherwise, and in due time he emerged from the mountains upon the flats.

Morning was well advanced, and the sun was shining brightly over the golden district which the delegate from Jimtown had quitted in such a hurry.

Halting his horse, he took a survey of the scene before him.

It did not take him long to discover that there had been a division of elements, since his leaving, and that one body held possession of the village, and the other the flats. Of Captain Crack-Shot and her band he could see nothing, and concluded that they had not yet put in an appearance.

"Now, here is a query?" he muttered. "How am I to know which party of this revolution is the one for me to approach? If I had a glass, I might be better able to find out. Eh! Skip! Are those the roughs up in the town?"

The dog wagged his tail, and smiled, for a dog can smile.

"Well, I'll take your word for it," Jack said. "Mind, I shall expect to find friends on the flats."

He accordingly rode forward toward the latter encampment.

When near to it, a man came forth to meet him; it was Old Somersault, the eccentric scout.

"Cuss my eternal old elerfanticums an' hyenas, ef I ain't glad ter see ye!" he cried, as he rode up, "tho' I ain't much acquainted with you. Ye see, we're in a kinder warlike attitude, jist at present, an' anxious like ter draft in all ther muscular animals ter our menagerie thet is poserbul."

"But how comes it you've got pushed back

from the village?" Jack asked. "You ought to have hung to that."

"True ernuff, pardner, but yer see thar war consarned contingencies as wouldn't admit o' ther great hippodrome performin' thar any longer, sech as leaden hail stuns an' powder-smoke—so we had ter dissemble, an' cut stick fer low ground. Ye see they had ther dead open an' shut on us, an' et warn't no use ter buck ag'in' sech bizness, or the hull teetotal sextupple expersition would hev stuck in ther mud, an' ther eternal ring performance ended."

"Humph! I should say you were of the circus kind," Jack said, "judging by your lingo."

"So I am! I'm a hull circus myself, when I'm wound up an' set a-goin. But I'll be fired from a catapult, ef I ain't got an undertakin' on my shoulders wot makes me feel as if ther old boss elerfant hed trod on me and flattened me out like ern Ohio pankaik."

"Indeed! and what is that?"

"Wall, ye see, I've got ther 'sponsibility on my back o' gittin' my sheer o' ther crowd out o' ther deefickulty, an' winnin' back ther town fer 'em, an' I reckon I grappled more than I kin git erway with, ter say ther least. I hed purty good grit, all along, ontill Crack-Shot an' her gang j'ined ther enemy—since then I'm blowed ef my old menagerie ain't all dubified."

"Ah! then she is over there, eh?"

"Yas. She sailed across ther flats, not half an hour ago, with a dozen men at her back, jist as sassy like as ye pleased. At furst, I reckon ther roughs' pickets weren't inclined ter let her pass, but she showed ther white flag, an' I reckon et's about as good as sworn to thet thar's a consolation taken place, an' they're gittin' ready ter pitch in an' lick blazes outen us."

"It savors that way," Jack admitted, with a smile. "But I reckon we're good enough for 'em, no matter how large is their number. By the way, had they two prisoners with them?"

"Yas—three on 'em—two women an' a feller. But tell us whar you've been?"

This Jack proceeded to do, as he and the scout walked into camp.

Here he was warmly welcomed by the citizens, who were not less alarmed than Somersault, and therefore eager to add reinforcements to their number.

About noon a general stir was noticed about the village—men were seen hurrying to and fro, some of them leading horses.

"Et's comin'!" Old Somersault said; "they're goin' ter make an attack on us, and we're goin' to git licked like blazes."

"Don't let yourself be fooled on that score!" Jack replied, the coolest man in the whole crowd. "While it is evident they are meditating an attack, they won't be apt to make a bold charge in broad daylight. I construe the present stir as an old Indian dodge. They propose to mount a few of their number, and set them scouring round the edge of the flats, for the purpose of worrying us, if possible, until night, when they may make an attack. In the mean time we must be preparing for them. Get a shovel, every man that can find one, and set to work throwing up a breastwork that will inclose a square of a couple hundred yards. If not enough shovels, take turns, and it won't take long to fix matters so that they can't mow us down at pleasure."

His dauntlessness inspired the men, and with one accord they set to work to obey his advice, which was the same as an order, for all now seemed to defer to him.

By mid-afternoon their camp was inclosed by a breastwork of dirt about four feet high, laid up like a flattened wall, behind which they could fight with great advantage.

CHAPTER IX.

THROUGH BY DARK.

KNOWING that his life was more precious to him even than gold, John Metcalf concluded it would be unwise as well as unhealthy for him to refuse to obey Arizona Abe's order, and

therefore dismounted from his perch on the barrel, marched to the office, procured his cash, several thousand dollars in amount, and handed it over to the ruffian chief.

Abraham shoved it into the pockets of his trousers with much evident satisfaction, remarking to his disciples that there would be a "divvy" later.

Then, to his surprise, Metcalf was seized and tied to the tree in front of the Old Bourbon, while the duke was accommodated in a like manner at an adjoining tree. The Englishman was very much angered at the way matters had turned out, and laid the blame on the rascally speculator.

"I was a fool for ever listening to you!" he said, when they were left to themselves; "and if I get free, I'll have reparation from you for this added outrage."

"I don't fear you," the speculator replied. "My money is gone just through you, and in all probability I shall never see it again. I fancy it pleased you when the roughs failed to treat with me?"

"It amused me, certainly."

"I'm your enemy henceforth," hissed the scoundrel; "and I'll possess your haughty daughter, too, in spite of you. Ha, ha! what a triumph it will be to humble the proud beauty!"

"You will first have to gain your liberty," the duke replied; "and I fancy my word will be taken here before yours. Even these roughs will be friendly to me when they know the truth," declared the duke.

Gipsy Jack was a favorite, and when formally requested to assume the captaincy by Old Somersault, there was general enthusiasm; every man in camp seemed to approve of his judgment.

As he had foreseen, a half-dozen horsemen dashed boldly out from the village and began scouring around the foot-hills which formed the sides of the natural basin.

Jack, borrowing a rifle from one of the miners, walked about within the inclosure, eyeing them with a frown of displeasure on his face.

"They act like fools," he said, "and unless I am mistaken, they'll get bitten."

After making the circle of the basin, they finally wheeled and dashed directly toward the barricades, yelling like madmen.

To their astonishment they ventured a little too far; Gipsy Jack's rifle cracked, and one of them toppled out of his saddle.

He was not killed evidently, for soon after his comrades beat a hasty retreat he followed their example on his hands and knees.

"That settles that," Jack announced. "We will have no further molestation until night, when I look for an attack. In the mean time, let's be preparing for it. Get all the weapons together and see how many there is in the camp. They are an article we have much to depend on, and the more we have the better."

"I've jest been thinkin' thet same," Old Somersault replied grimly. "Thout plenty o' pop-guns, we might as well give up thet ghost, and disband thet hull consarned menagerie, clown and all."

An investigation proved that there were fifty-three able-bodied men in the camp and two women—the sisters, before mentioned—and there were but a dozen rifles at command.

Most of the citizens had fought with revolvers in the beginning of the affray, and when forced to retreat had not been allowed time to secure other weapons.

Most every person had one or more revolvers, but even for these there was but a limited amount of ammunition.

"This is bad," Jack said gloomily. "We can't do much without rifles, and they're two to our one, and well armed. Somehow or other we must contrive to get some of their weapons."

"I dunno how et can be did," Somersault said. "I allow et aint no use tryin' to get inter ther village in daylight, an' if we wait till dark et may be too late."

Jack paced about the camp for some moments in deep thought.

The miners watched him anxiously.

"I reckon I've hit upon a plan," he said, finally. "As Somersault says, it would be rash to attempt to enter the enemy's quarters at present, and so I will send my dog. He will not be apt to attract any particular attention, and by frequent trips, can accomplish considerable."

"Ef yer don't want ter lose yer canine, jest take yer unkie's advice and keep him here within the menagerie!" Somersault advised. "Ther dog can't fetch no weepens, an' he'd only git killed."

"That remains to be seen," Jack replied. "I'd almost risk my life on the intelligence of Skip; in fact he's saved my life already on two different occasions. His rescuing me from the roasting-stake this morning shows what he can do."

No sooner did Skip hear his name mentioned than he came trotting forward, wagging his tail understandingly.

"Ha! ha! old boy, we were just talking about you!" the man from Jimtown said, patting him affectionately. "Can you turn us a somersault, Skip?"

The sagacious canine uttered an affirmative bark, and reared upon its hind feet—then bounding quickly to its front feet, it shot up into air and turned a complete evolution, landing safely again upon its feet.

The crowd with one accord gave vent to a yell of approval, which evidently pleased the dog, for he lay down and rolled over, and barked with delight.

"That was good, Skip. You'll command a hundred beefsteaks a week in any circus!" Gipsy Jack laughed. "Now can you show us which is, in your opinion, the prettiest man in the crowd by springing upon his shoulders?"

For a moment the canine-graduate gazed around him doubtfully, for the rank and file of beauty was rather limited in that camp. He finally, however, uttered a bark and sprang upon the shoulders of "Spunk," one of the sisters of the lunch stand, who was arrayed in semi-male attire.

"Ha! ha! good choice! but a slight mistake nevertheless," Jack said. "Now, come here, Skip. Can you tell a good gun from a bad one?"

The dog wagged his tail and went and squatted in front of Old Somersault's handsome rifle.

"Sure enough—thet dorg knows his P's an' Q's!" the old scout ejaculated, well pleased at the compliment for his trusty old weapon.

"I should smile," Jack replied, raising his pet in his arms. "Now, Skip, up yonder," and he pointed to the village—"they have more rifles than they know what to do with—rifles, do you understand?" and he touched one. Skip evidently did understand. "Go and get!" pointing again to the village.

Springing from his arms, the wonderful dog leaped over the breastworks and crawled in a circuitous way toward the village.

An hour after his departure Skip was seen returning, dragging a rifle, the waist of the butt being grasped between his teeth.

He was pretty well fagged out by the time he reached the camp, and was relieved of his burden, which was a rifle of handsome appearance.

Jack made him rest before returning for another, and the villagers flocked around him and fed him well of such edibles as they possessed.

Then, he was allowed to go again, and returned in due time with another purloined rifle.

In this way did the faithful animal perform the services required of him until he had succeeded in dragging seven rifles to the camp.

The eighth time he set forth, it was getting dark, and he did not return with his accustomed promptness. An hour passed, and still he came not.

Gipsy Jack was very anxious, now, as was

evident by his impatient stride about the camp, and the rest were not less so, on his account.

"I reckon et's all up wi' ther poor dorg," Somersault said. "Ef not trapped, he'd be back before this."

"Unless he has found Calamity Jane—my wi—" Jack was about to add, but suddenly checked himself.

It might be known to these people whom Calamity Jane had married; he had come near giving away his secret.

"Calamity Jane is a great favorite with Skip," he quickly added, "and if he has chanced to discover her, I don't believe he'd leave the camp until he made an effort to rescue her."

"I'm mighty glad ter hear thet, an' hope 'er dog'll cum out all right," Old Somersault declared, "ter when ye git ready ter pass in yer checks, I want yer ter will the animile ter me."

"When I do, I'll perhaps accommodate you," Jack replied, with a smile.

The movements of the ruffians at the village seemed to indicate preparations for a nocturnal attack.

"Do you think the attack will come early, or late, in the night?" one of the miners asked of Jack.

"Indications point to an attack, before long. Let every man have his shooting-irons ready," the leader ordered. "The moon is rising, and that will be in our favor."

"Et aint a-goin' ter save ther menagerie from goin' ter pieces," Old Somersault prophesied, dubiously. "Mebbe I'm er consarned ant-eater, but blast me ef I don't feel et in my bones that we can't hold out ag'in' two ter our one, an' wi' only a few weepens, too."

"It don't look as if we were destined to achieve an easy victory," Gipsy Jack confessed, "and while I don't recommend flight, I don't want to advise any one to remain here. I've been inventorying matters, for an hour past, and I can't see any chance beyond retreat to the foot-hills, except one."

"And what is that?" Somersault asked. "One chance in a thousand, is often better'n none, darn my pet hippopotamusses ef et aint."

"The only chance I see is to take advantage of this darkness, before the moon rises, and creep from this place, in a roundabout way toward the village, and wait until the enemy makes an advance on our line. Then, we are to rush in and take possession of the shanties, so that we shall be able to give them a reception on their return!"

This plan was greeted with a cheer.

"Et's a good ijeer!" Somersault agreed, "ef we can only find ther way clear."

"I don't believe we shall experience much trouble, on that score," Jack replied, "as it is likely that the majority of the enemy will join in the attack. If anything is to be done, let us act at once."

And they did.

Leaving everything behind them, except their weapons, they cleared the barricades, and crept flat upon their faces toward the western side of the village, in a circuitous way, the darkness perfectly screening their movements.

They had barely gained their objective point, when a series of unearthly yells rent the night, from the other side of the town!

CHAPTER X.

TRACHERY—A MISERABLE SCOUNDREL.

By those selfsame yells Gipsy Jack knew that the ruffians had made a dash from the town, toward the barricades.

"Hurrah! double-quick, now, and forward!" Jack cried, springing up over the knoll behind which they had been hiding. "If we want to get to cover, now is our time, quickly and silently!"

Up over the knoll the men dashed, and down into the village, like a pack of hostile Indians bent on a surprise, just as the brilliant full

moon thrust her radiant face above the horizon.

Not a rough was in view, as they hastened down the single main street; to all appearance the enemy had folded their tents and stolen silently away—which, for a time, was true.

"Where shall we quarter?" Old Somersault asked, as they ran.

"Divide into four bands, and get into the cover of an equal number of strong shanties—then, each band send a man out to skirmish for provender and weapons, before the roughs return. I will take possession of the Bourbon place, with a part of the men!" was the ready decision.

And so it was done.

With a dozen of the men Jack took possession of the tavern; Old Somersault and another dozen quartered in a shanty nearly opposite, and the two other divisions under a man named Rogers, and one named Weldon, took possession of a couple of shanties further down the street toward the flats, at Jack's direction, so as to give the enemy the opening salute when they returned from their bloodless victory.

After securing this retreat somewhat by closing the oaken shutters, and affixing bars to the doors, Jack slipped from the tavern, and in company with Old Somersault, visited the neighboring shanties on a foraging expedition, and in quest of additional weapons and ammunition.

But in this they were only moderately successful, as only half a dozen rifles and a few boxes of cartridges could be found, and but a very limited supply of jerked venison, and bread.

Dividing these, they hurried back to their respective retreats, and prepared for the onslaught of the enemy, whom they could hear returning, with disappointed yells.

"Ready, my lads," Jack commanded, in his calm, authoritative way. "When the gang comes within sight, give it to them without mercy—the same as they would have done to us, had they caught us in the pen on the flats. It's to-night's work that tells who bosses this town. If the boys below work in right, we can break the ranks of the enemy."

That the lower delegations were wide awake soon became evident, by the report of two heavy volleys, fired upon the roughs, as they came pouring back into the town.

Taken entirely by surprise, they broke in confusion, and scattered in every direction, such as were not mowed down.

A dozen, headed by Crack-Shot, dashed up the street, at break-neck speed.

As they came opposite the tavern, two more destructive volleys opened upon them, and in consternation they broke and scattered again, the girl road-agent and one or two others being the only ones to escape uninjured.

"Hal! hal! I fancy we've rather put 'em out, thus far," Jack muttered. "At least it will take them some time to collect their scattered senses and scattered dead, and I don't imagine this surprise will serve to improve their confidence in their own abilities."

As might be supposed, the enemy, such as were lucky enough to escape, were careful to keep out of sight and rifle range, and those who were only wounded were permitted to crawl off without further molestation.

Shortly after the affray was over, Jack quitted his 'fort,' and visited the other three shanties to compare notes.

From all that he could learn, not over half a dozen had been killed, and a dozen or more injured, which still left the enemy stronger in numbers than he had supposed.

"I wonder what they're up to?" Old Somersault queried. "First we know they'll work in some one-hoss act on us, an' take us by surprise."

"They've probably drawn off at a safe distance, and are concocting schemes for our edification," Jack replied. "I'm going to make a reconnoissance, and if they become troublesome before I get back, give them some of the same dose we did awhile ago."

He then loaded his belt weapons, and left the shanty by the rear way.

Instead of returning to the tavern he skulked cautiously along from one shanty to another, keeping well in their shadows, beyond which the moonlight now radiated.

In this way he continued to scout along, until he saw a glow of light at the north-western terminus of the town; accordingly shaped his course toward it, still using the utmost caution.

The last shanty was built upon a ridge-like eminence, somewhat higher than the other buildings, and from its site the ground slanted east and west.

In a little grove or motte at the foot of the western slope Jack could see the glimmer of a camp fire, and concluded that the enemy had taken refuge here.

"I wonder if I can get down there and overhear their plans," he muttered, tightening his belt. "In the early days of Deadwood I used to have considerable skill in spying."

Dropping on his hands and knees, he crept softly down the slope, keeping in the shadow of a fringe of brier bushes, which bordered a channel worn out by the flood-water of heavy rains.

In this way he succeeded in getting into the cover of the timber without discovery.

To reach the camp-fire, around which Crack-Shot and the men were collected in the midst of a seemingly interesting discussion, was another thing, as he could see figures among the trees, between him and the camp.

There seemed no other way for him than to make a detour around the motte, and enter it upon the opposite side, which he proceeded to do.

Arrived on the other side, he made a discovery that he had not expected.

Bound to a tree at the edge of the motte were Metcalf, the speculator, and the duke.

He ran suddenly upon them, and they saw him, in turn, before he had time to retreat.

"Hal! help at last!" Metcalf said, in a low tone. "Have you come to free us?"

"Hum! I don't know about that," Jack replied. "What are you doing here, after deserting the other party? Pray explain that."

"We did not desert," the speculator boldly answered. "We were kidnapped from the other camp, and brought here to be given the lead of the roughs, but as we positively refused to do a thing for them, they tied us up here, as you see."

"I have my doubts about this matter!" Jack said, scratching his head. "If I were to express an opinion, I should say that you deserted and came over to this party, thinking to get in as head man, and they promptly rejected you and put you where you'd keep safe."

"Indeed, you are wrong. My interest lies with the citizens—not with the roughs. So please release me."

"I'll have to think about that while I'm spying on yonder camp. I believe it would be quite as profitable to have you remain right where you are, for all parties concerned."

"Curse you! you forget you are in my power."

"How so, pray?"

"In more ways than one. If you don't release me, I'll bring the roughs down on you. Secondly, if you don't release me, I'll not tell you where Calamity Jane is."

"How do you know I care to be informed on that subject?"

"Ha, ha! I knew you the moment you came to Durango. Once the face of Deadwood Dick is seen it is rarely forgotten, and having heard of your marriage with Calamity Jane, I naturally concluded that you would like to see her. I don't want to be at swords' points with a man of your caliber, but if you won't do a human act in releasing me from the power of this ruffian gang, you can't blame me if I feel revengeful."

"Perhaps not; but how am I to know you

will put me on track of Calamity even after I free you?"

"My word of honor ought to be a guarantee, had it not?"

"I hardly know. I will however release you, but I'd advise you not to cut up any act of treachery if you wish to survive."

"You needn't fear. I am not treacherous. Release me, and I will remain here until you return, and then accompany you back to the village."

Trusting the man would, in this case, if at no other time, be as good as his word, Gipsy Jack drew his knife and severed the bonds that bound him.

"See that you return your gratitude by perfect silence, while I spy upon the enemy," he said; then turned and stole stealthily toward the camp fire.

When he was out of hearing, a gloating expression of triumph disfigured John Metcalf's face, and he strode over to where the duke was bound.

"Hal! hal! you see I am free first," he sneered, shaking his fist in the nobleman's face. "Now maybe you'll admit that I am to come off victorious, in spite of you. I foresee the result already. I happen to know where the lovely Lady Myra is hidden, and I shall embrace an early opportunity to visit her."

Then slapping the duke smartly on the cheek, with a brutal laugh, he turned toward the camp.

Jack had gained a position a few yards in the rear of the band, and was in a precarious situation, should they perchance discover him.

Metcalf seemed to comprehend the fact, and turned and bounded out of the grove, at the same instant shouting at the top of his voice:

"Spies! spies—look out for spies!"

This was his gratitude.

Half a mile north-west of the motte, in a wild rocky glen of the foot hills Captain Crack-Shot had hidden her three prisoners—Calamity Jane, the duke's daughter, and the male prisoner, a young mountaineer by the title of Wildcat Joe.

It was a place seldom visited, as nothing was there except rugged rocks, deep forest and labyrinthian water gullies to attract, and was probably as good a hiding-place as the wily brigand queen could have found anywhere in that region.

Metcalf had seen the prisoners conducted in that direction, and knowing of the glen, had concluded that they were taken there.

After basely betraying Jack's presence to the roughs, he ran with all his might in the direction of the glen, and in due time reached its concealment, and found as he had expected, the prisoners bound to trees, close to each other.

They were greatly surprised at sight of him, and he in turn appeared greatly excited.

"Which one of you ladies goes by the name of Calamity Jane?" he asked, gazing from one to the other, and not recognizing Lady Myra, who was a pretty, graceful maiden, approaching maturity.

"I am Calamity Jane," that heroic woman answered. "What do you want?"

"I have been sent for you. Deadwood Dick is dying, in a cabin below here and I came to to the ruffians' camp to find you."

"Then for Heaven's sake release me, and guide me to the place!" the girl cried excitedly.

"Certainly. Shall these other people also accompany us?"

"Yes. They will be only too glad to gain their liberty, after a long and tedious imprisonment."

Accordingly Metcalf released them, and led the way toward the north, along the foot hills.

An hour brought them in sight of a cabin, the door of which was open.

Forward they went, Metcalf in the lead, until they reached the door, when he pushed them in ahead of him, quickly jerked the door shut, and locked it on the outside.

"Hal ha! how the tables do turn, sometimes," he muttered, as he hastened away from the spot. "I reckon they'll keep, in that windowless den, until I get ready to dispose of them. Hal ha!"

But he was mistaken.

Shortly after his departure, who should appear at the lone cabin but—Skip!

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE ENEMY'S POWER.

THE base ingratitude of John Metcalf placed Gipsy Jack in danger hard to evade, for he had just obtained a position behind a tree not half a dozen yards from the camp fire when the treacherous warning pealed through the motte, causing every ruffian to leap to his feet, and seize a weapon, while men began to rush in every direction, in quest of the spy.

Hearing the cry, Jack fully realized that something desperate must be done if he would escape.

Retreat was out of the question, and there was but one move to make, and he made it.

Reaching up overhead, he caught hold of a limb, and drew himself quickly up among the foliage.

Quick as he was, however, he was too late to avoid discovery, and a half-dozen bullets whistled after him.

Fortunately none of them hit him, and he was not tardy in clambering up among the thickest of the branches, where he would not be so liable to be reached by the merciless leaden messengers.

But he knew well enough that it would not be healthy for him, in that one particular tree, very long, in spite of the darkness, so he resolved to move into another, as he was able to do, as the limbs of the densely growing trees ran in among each other, forming a veritable jungle.

To accomplish this, however, without betraying his whereabouts necessitated great caution.

A pandemonium of shouts below warned him that some one was climbing the tree in pursuit.

With the stealth of a cat, he crawled from one tree into another, and from that still another, continuing his strange journey, in hopes of reaching the extremity of the motte.

But, he was doomed to disappointment, for, anticipating his object, the ruffians seemed to guess the trees he had selected, and followed underneath, with flaring torches, and savage yells and blasphemy. So that by the time he had reached the edge of the tree growth, they were there, too, ready to nab him, should he leap to the ground.

"Ye'd better come down, as ye can't git away!" Arizona Abe bawled, fiercely. "We're bound ter her have ye, an' a few minutes parley ain't agoin' ter do ye any good!"

"I don't know about that," Jack muttered, to himself. "I've known a few minutes parley to mean a very considerable victory. It don't look as if it can effect much, in this case, however. Nothing seems for me to do but go back the same way I came."

This he proceeded to do, by clambering into a tree he had but recently left. The next minute he heard some one among the branches, just ahead of him, and also heard some one climbing into the tree he had just left.

Thus, he was cornered.

Ahead of him a foe, and behind him a foe—he must come in contact with one or the other, or else surrender to the human wolves who were waiting for him, below.

"Say! ain't ye comin' down?" Arizona yelled, impatiently. "Et won't do no good to be offish, fer we've got ye, foul, sure's you live."

"All right—when I drop, you'll be still more certain you've got me!" Jack retorted.

"Hello! I recognize the voice!" Captain Crack-Shot exclaimed. "Boys, the chap in the tree is Deadwood Dick, alias Gipsy Jack. A hundred dollars to whoever captures him alive."

"Humph! I'll bet some one will earn it, before I'm taken," Dick muttered as he drew his revolvers, and cocked them ready for use, while he kept a close watch around him. Several minutes passed without his seeing or hearing any one in the branches, but at last he caught a glimpse of the man in the tree just ahead of him, looking toward the center of the motte.

Quickly leveling his revolver, Jack fired. There came, as an answer, a cry of pain and rage; then there was a crashing of twigs and branches as the ruffian went tumbling down to the ground, followed by angry yells from his comrades.

Supposing that Jack would then continue through the tree-tops, toward the further side of the motte, they surged that way, with fierce oaths.

This was precisely what Jack had supposed they would do, and wanted them to do, while he remained right where he was, awaiting further developments.

The man from the outer tree came clambering over into the same tree Jack was in, but in the confusion, Jack had mounted into the top-most branches, and not seeing his victim, the ruffian passed on, supposing that his man had gone back toward the middle of the motte.

Waiting until they were out of sight Jack glided down from his perch, and dropped from the lower branches to the ground.

The instant he did so, Arizona Abe and three of his comrades sprung forward upon him, and forced him to the ground ere he could use his weapons.

"Hol hol we cotched ye at it, that time, didn't we?" Abe roared, triumphantly. "Ye thort ye'd fool me, but we war too fly fer ye, you bet!"

Jack did not reply, but suffered himself to be bound, for strong and quick though he was, he was no match for the four ruffians.

The victorious cries of the captors soon brought the rest of the gang to the spot, headed by Captain Crack Shot.

"Hal ha! so you're once more in durance vile, are you, my noble Richard of Deadwood?" she exclaimed, triumphantly, when she saw him lying helplessly on his back on the ground. "I fancied your lease of liberty would soon expire."

"Did you?" Jack retorted. "I am not greatly surprised. But for the treachery of a human snake I should not be your prisoner."

"Perhaps not," the female brigand replied, "and but for your lead of the gang up in the village, things would be shaped different now, and we'd have a dozen more men. But for you, they'd never have thought of the move for possession."

"Then I'm pleased to know I have been of so much service to them," was the calm reply.

"Curse ye—mebbe ye think et warn't no harm ter kill off our men, ther way ye did!" Arizona Abe growled, while the other ruffians looked decidedly savage and unruly.

"I believe it's an old saying that all is fair in love or war, and as you paid a visit to our camp, with the intention of cleaning us out, it was no more than fair that we should salute your unsuccessful return," said Jack.

"Then, durn yer boots, I opine et ain't no more'n fair that we should hoist ye ter ther furst handy limb, an' let ye swing a while!" the ruffian cried. "What say, boys?—who's got a rope?"

"Stop! I protest against this. Deadwood Dick is my game, and I don't want him harmed, just yet!" Captain Crack-Shot interposed. "No mutiny, now—you agreed if I joined you to let me have command!"

"So we did," the Arizonian acknowledged, "an' I opine we're ther boys w'at sticks ter our word, every time, tho' I'd orfully like ter send off this chap, who did et up fer our pards."

"That's time enough for that hereafter!" Crack-Shot replied. "In the mean time the darkness is our time to lay for the enemy, according to the plan I was proposing awhile ago. Tie the prisoner snugly to a tree, and

I'll risk but what he'll keep until we get ready to dispose of him."

Jack was accordingly raised and bound to a tree, and moreover, gagged so effectually that he could not utter a word.

Then, headed by the Girl Brigand, the ruffians moved silently and in single file from the motte toward the village, not so much as a word passing between them.

Jack was left in a place where the moonlight did not penetrate, and darkness reigned almost supreme.

And it was not in a very enviable frame he was left in.

He felt sure the roughs had some villainous scheme concocted for the destruction of the citizens, or mayhap, the town, and it angered him that he was not able to warn the unsuspecting victims in time for them to prepare to meet the blow, whatever shape it was to come in.

This time he could hardly look for rescue from Skip!

And where was the faithful brute?

At the lone cabin, where, at last mention, he had just arrived; that he arrived there by mere chance was evident, for he smelled about inquisitively, and wagged his tail as though he had made a discovery.

Then he uttered a low bark.

"Skip! Skip! is that you?" the voice of Calamity Jane cried, from the inside of the log prison.

The dog gave another bark, and a whine of recognition of the voice of his mistress.

"It is the dog, sure enough," Calamity said to her two companions. "We are not in such desperate straits as might be, for he is a sharp fellow, and if there is any show for it, he will get us free."

"I don't see much of a chance for it; in fact, I can't see anything till we have a light," Wildcat Joe replied. "This den appears to be without windows, and has but one door, which the rascal locked. I don't see what was his object in releasing us from one captivity to place us in another."

"He evidently has some scheme afoot for personal advantage to be gained," Calamity declared; "probably to extort money from my husband."

"I think I recognized him as a former rejected suitor, who was once in my father's employ as amanuensis and clerk," Lady Myra said. "I think he knew me, too, but for some reason pretended otherwise."

"If this is true, probably he has other designs," Calamity replied.

Wildcat Joe struck a match then, and set fire to some leaves that had some time sifted into the cabin.

By the light thus afforded he saw that the cabin was destitute of any tool or article that could in any way serve to assist them in escaping.

The leaves soon burned up, and they were once more left in total darkness.

"I'm thinking we'll wait a long while before any dog can get us out," he said. "This cabin was evidently built for the purpose for which it is now used."

"Skip! Skip! what are you doing?" Calamity called.

"Hark! I hear him digging, like as if in dirt!" Lady Myra said. "Perhaps he is really trying to dig us out."

By listening they were able to hear the same scratching sound, accompanied by growls and the noise of scattering dirt.

"That is what he is doing, true enough," Calamity admitted. "We can help him by using our hands."

There was no floor to the cabin except the ground, and that was not hard.

Closer attention apprised them that Skip had commenced proceedings so as to dig under the door, and they accordingly set to work so as to meet him half-way.

Lady Myra's hands had never been hardened to any work of this kind, and therefore she

was excused, Calamity and Joe doing the digging.

"This might seem more interesting if we were getting pay-dirt at the same time while digging for liberty," Wildcat Joe remarked, jocosely.

"Gold is hardly to be compared to liberty, as I look at it," Calamity replied.

They worked rapidly and faithfully, and soon had quite a hole dug.

Skip, on the outside, was working as sturdily as they, as they could judge by his heavy panting, and the sound of flying dirt, and he was evidently making nearly as great headway, too, as were they.

Liberty seemed near at hand, but just as they were thinking this, the sound of rapidly-approaching footsteps and a man's savage curses were heard.

Was Metcalf returning?

Next came more curses—cries of "Get out, you devilish pup!"—then several shots were fired in rapid succession, the bullets striking upon the stout oaken door like hail, but not penetrating through.

Then Skip was heard to leave his work and leap away with savage growls—then came more oaths, more snarls and angry yelps of the dog—more excited cries of the man, and finally:

"Help! help! my God! h-e-l-p!"

"Mercy!" Calamity gasped, her face paling. "If the poor wretch don't get assistance, he will be torn to pieces. Skip is like a panther when he's thoroughly aroused."

Wildcat Joe sprung forward, and hurled his body against the door with great force.

The old hinges loosened by the powerful shock, and Joe and the door went crashing outward to the ground!

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

THE crash occasioned by the falling of the door frightened the dog, evidently, for he leaped from John Metcalf, whom he had "downed" and was biting in a horrible manner.

That was enough for the unlucky speculator. Blood-blinded, as it were, he needed no urging, and springing to his feet, as soon as the dog drew off, he ran with all his might toward the distant motte, howling and cursing with pain at every step.

Skip would have renewed pursuit, but Calamity sprung from the cabin and called him.

Skip was very much pleased to see his mistress, and received loud praise from both Lady Myra and Wildcat Joe, all of which he seemed to enjoy.

"You weren't going to be made a target of, were you, Skip?" Calamity said. "I don't blame you much for going for the ornery skunk."

Then she turned to Wildcat Joe.

"Well, we owe our freedom to you then, rather than to Skip—and now that we are free, we must decide what is our next best move. From what we saw and learned there is a sort of one-horse rebellion going on between the roughs and the citizens, so we must fight shy of the one, and join the other party with whom my husband must be. But, before we can do this, with safety, a reconnaissance must be made. Allowing you're a good scout, and all that, I reckon you'd better stay somewhere in this neighborhood as protection for Lady Myra, while I go and see what show there is for our getting into the citizens' camp."

"Don't you think I had better go? If I get my skull broke, it isn't of so much account as yours."

"Don't fear about my getting hurt," Calamity replied, nonchalantly. "I've roughed it too long in the wild West, to be easily hurt, unless taken by surprise. Besides, I want to scare up that husband of mine, if he is to be found, for the looking. Up yonder I see the mouth of a dark ravine. You and Lady Myra

go there and secrete yourselves, until I return, which will be as soon as possible—or, at least, as soon as it is safe to tempt to reach the camp."

Leaving them Calamity crept toward the motte, accompanied by Skip, who was as good a guard as she need have, as his keen nostrils never failed to scent danger, when it was around.

In due time she reached the grove, or motte, which looked dark and forbidding.

She paused in the outskirts, to listen, but hearing nothing, she advanced, stealthily, until a terrible sight just in front of her caused her to stop short, with an exclamation.

A man was bound to a tree—a dead man, at that, and a stranger to her—with a knife driven to the hilt in his breast.

"Some one has done bad work here," Calamity muttered, with a shiver—"probably that wretch whom Skip chewed up. I wonder who this is? Lady Myra's father, I'll bet! Heaven forbid that it is so!"

She had no time to ponder on the possibilities of the case, and so passed on by the tree.

Near the further end of the motte she paused again, Skip having sniffed the air and given vent to a whine.

"Hello! what's up—what do you scent, Skip?" she said, pausing and listening intently.

The dog whined again, and wagged his tail. Then Calamity heard a sound, as if some one were groaning.

"Perhaps it is Dick in trouble," she thought suddenly—"or else why does Skip whine?"

Then to the dog she said:

"Who is it, Skip? is it Dick?"

The dog wagged his tail, and whined again, piteously.

"Then, if it is your master, go find him at once."

This command seemed to please the intelligent creature, for putting his nose to the ground, he trotted away in the direction whence came the sound, and with eager footsteps, Calamity followed.

As a result they soon came to where Deadwood Dick was lashed to the tree.

A joyful meeting it was between Dick and his lost rifle, whose hands were not slow in liberating him from his captivity.

"I was rather dubious about getting free this time, with my accustomed good luck," Dick said, after hurried explanations had been given; "and, even though I am delighted to be reunited to you, I have work to do. The roughs set out to attack the village, and I cannot rest until I strike in defense of the citizens. I must go and see what the roughs are up to, and if I cannot get in a blow in favor of the other party."

"Then I'll go with you," Calamity said, decidedly. "I reckon I ain't a-goin' to let you venture into danger again, without having my share of it—and you know how I am when there's any fighting to do."

"I fancy so," Dick replied, with a light laugh. "Come on! we will again work together as a team in behalf of the right."

Accompanied by their dog, they quitted the motte, and crawled stealthily toward the town.

"I reckon they're up to fire," Dick said, as they crawled along, pointing toward the clouding sky, where a reddish glow began to appear. "If they fire the buildings that the defenders are in, I'm afraid there will be dreadful work."

Creeping rapidly, they soon reached the top of the eminence, where stood the shanty before mentioned, and from where they could command a view of the main part of the camp.

Here they paused to take observations. The ruffians had evidently not fired any buildings yet, but that they were preparing for some plan of attack was probable.

They had built a big bonfire in the street, just out of easy rifle range from either of the shanties that sheltered the defenders, and were adding fresh fuel to it.

Just what their future plan of action was

Dick of course could not guess, but concluded that he could not get a sightlier position than he at present occupied wherefrom to note the movements of the enemy.

"We cannot well reach the shanties without making a wide detour, and yet if they make an attack, I don't see what aid we can give them from this point," suggested Calamity.

"Not much, unless we can get weapons. You wait here, and I will explore this old shanty and see if we cannot have our needs supplied."

The door in front was locked, but he soon discovered a rear entrance open, and went into the apparently deserted building.

He was gone quite a time, and Calamity had about made up her mind to go in search of him, when she heard him returning. A moment later he appeared around the corner of the house, hauling after him an old howitzer. It was rusted and battered, yet looked capable of doing duty.

"Hello! where did you find that?" Calamity asked, running forward to help him pull it.

"Oh! I found the wheels and the gun in the back shed," Dick replied, "and I didn't know but what we might establish a little battery of our own, so I contrived to remount the piece."

"Not a bad idea, for look! the roughs have really fired the tavern, and several are skulking in a roundabout way to fire the other buildings, while the rest are standing ready to make a rush upon the citizens when they shall be forced out by the fire!"

"I'll see if I can't scatter 'em," Dick said, grimly. "In the shed you'll find a small keg of coarse powder. Go fetch it, while I gather some coarse gravel for bullets."

Calamity obeyed, and Dick collected a number of quartz heard-heads of the size of hens' eggs, for the bright moon afforded plenty of light for their work.

When Calamity returned with the powder, he proceeded to load the gun as rapidly as possible, using dry grass for wadding, in lieu of anything better.

He soon had the gun well charged, then he carefully trained its muzzle so that the load would carry about into the center of the ruffians' temporary camp.

Procuring a long pole, he wrapped a paper upon one end, set fire to it, and then, getting at a safe distance, touched off the piece.

A thundering report followed, that fairly made the earth tremble.

As soon as the smoke cleared, the eyes of the two artillerists sought the ruffians' camp.

The volley had done no harm.

Inexperience in training field-pieces had caused Dick to level his weapon too high, and, as a result, the shot had riddled a shanty just in front of the ruffians, and between them and the tavern.

The attack had, however, been instrumental in creating confusion among the roughs, and a score of them were setting out, with hoarse shouts of vengeance, toward the light, on a run.

"We shall have to take leg bail for security, now!" Calamity said, excitedly.

"Pooh! I don't agree with you, in that," Dick replied, pouring some more powder into the elevated muzzle of the gun, and reloading rapidly. "I reckon I can catch 'em 'fore they catch us!"

He finished loading in a jiffy, and then, springing to the top of the gun, he waved his hat and shouted:

"Back! back! or I'll sweep you! Fair warning!"

But it was a warning they evidently did not see fit to heed, for they came swiftly on, firing as they ran, their bullets buzzing unpleasantly around the spot where the two gunners stood.

Springing down, Dick once more carefully trained the gun to bear on the crowd, while the quick-handed Calamity placed the long-handled torch ready in his hand.

Bang! the report was terrible; but not less terrible than the destruction the volley made,

as only three men escaped with their lives, and they, in dismay, retreated, with howls of terror.

"That was a blizzard!" Deadwood Dick muttered, with a little shiver, as he noted what havoc he had wrought. "I give 'em fair warning, anyhow, and their rashness has met its reward. The deuce is to pay, down yonder, however!"

And so it was.

The reports of the cannon had drawn the citizen's party from cover, to see what was the matter, and watching for something of this kind, the roughts had made an attack upon them, and a furious battle was beginning to rage in the street, the reports of weapons and shouts of men making a great din.

"No use trying to do anything with the gun, now!" Deadwood Dick said, grimly, "The likeliest thing we can do is to cut around, and reach our party. If we are expeditious, we may be able to be of some service to them."

They accordingly made a run for it, in a roundabout way.

Ten minutes' run brought them up in the rear of the citizen party, who were bravely standing their ground, and fighting like tigers.

Their number had been considerably lessened, already, but not more so than had that of the roughts, who were still headed by the female brigand and Arizona Abe, while the citizens had but one leader to look to, in the person of Old Somersault, and when he should fall, they promised to lose courage.

But, just when the tide seemed near turning in the favor of the ruffians, Deadwood Dick and Calamity pushed in to the front, well equipped with the revolvers which they had taken from the dead men.

Their coming and Dick's ringing shouts of encouragement seemed to inspire the citizens with new spirit, and they went forward with increasing fire, forcing the ruffians back.

Crack-Shot saw Dick, and knew it was his coming that had re-inspired the citizen crowd, and also realized that her crowd was going to pieces, unless he could be dropped from the lead.

"Curse you," she shouted, "I'll have my revenge now!"

And she leveled a revolver straight at his heart.

But before she could pull trigger, a shot struck her in the left side, that wilted her like a leaf to the ground.

"Great hail-storms! we're done for, now!" Arizona Abe cried as soon as he saw her fall, and with the purpose of deserting his comrades he made a leap to one side to escape.

But, comprehending his intention, one of her men shot him down before he had gone half a dozen steps.

The battle thereafter was short and decisive.

With victorious shouts the citizens rushed at the ruffians, who began to retreat under the withering, ceaseless fire, until finally, as if by mutual consent, they broke ranks and fled pell-mell for life and safety.

Several, even then, bit the dust before they got out of rifle range, but about half of the brigands succeeded in making their escape to the mountains. And, as may be imagined, the escaped roughts did not return to renew the contest, but took themselves to other scenes of action, a safe distance from Durango, of bloody memory.

When morning dawned, which was not long after the conclusion of the battle, the wounded of both parties were picked up and carried to the tavern, and every care bestowed upon them that could serve to relieve them of suffering.

The killed were buried, and the scene about the town was once more, to outward view, calm and serene.

Among the apparently wounded, John Metcalf was found, by Deadwood Dick and Old Somersault, lying flat upon his back, very com-posedly.

Investigation proved that he was not hurt in the least, and that he was evidently trying to

play off hurt until he could get an opportunity to escape unnoticed.

"I think we will take this worthy in charge!" Dick said, grimly, and they bound him securely. "Calamity ran across a man in the grove in the night, whom I think this wretch murdered—and besides, I allow there are numerous unhealthy charges against him."

"For God's sake, let me go!" Metcalf pleaded, piteously. "I confess to killing Leigh, and other treachery, but let me have my liberty and I will forever leave this spot, and promise to be a better man!"

"Nineteenth century promises are about as transparent as ethereal gauze, unless clinched by security," Dick replied. "I will have nothing to say concerning your disposal. You must look to your enemies for mercy."

He was taken to the tavern and put under guard.

Dick sent for the body of the Duke of Leigh, and for Lady Myra and Wildcat, Joe in whom, on his arrival, he recognized a former member of his once famous road-agent band.

Lady Myra's great grief at her father's death, aroused the citizens to extreme wrath against Metcalf, as he had confessed having committed the crime. To such an extent did their anger get the better of them that the poor wretch was taken in charge by a number of them, and dragged to the tree where Leigh had been murdered, and there lynched!

Captain Crack-Shot was among those who had been picked up, more dead than alive, and conveyed to the tavern.

About sunset she made a request to see Deadwood Dick, and that at once.

Somewhat surprised on being informed of her desire, Dick made his way to her bedside, and found her sitting up, bolstered by a pillow.

"Did you wish to see me?" he asked, approaching.

"Yes. I have not long to live, and wanted to talk with you," she said, in a matter-of-fact way. "I have prayed for forgiveness, and hope to receive it. I was a fool to think I could ever get the best of a man of your caliber. And, now, that the end for me is near, I want to ask your forgiveness for what injury, attempted and real, that I have done you."

"Your feeling is commendable and I freely forgive you," Dick said, kindly.

"Oh! I am so glad! I know you are a brave, noble man, and my admiration is not less for your wife. I am dying, and I must leave behind me immense wealth. Not the earnings of my lawless career, understand you, nor the earnings of my gambler father—but gold! gold! that would enrich a dozen people. I found it once buried in a secret place, where some people of generations long past and gone evidently buried it. I intended to enjoy it some day, but now that will be impossible. To tell you where to find it I have not strength nor long enough lease of life. Here is a golden cross, however, that holds the secret. It is hollow, and a spring opens it. Inside you will find full directions. Will you accept this from me as a present—as an atonement for what wrong I have done you?"

"If you wish; I will not refuse," Dick replied, in astonishment.

"Then take it; it is yours forever. But don't open it until I have been dead one month. You may go now, as I wish my last moments to be in prayer for God's pity and forgiveness."

So Dick left her presence, bearing in his hands the cross that was the key to a buried fortune.

The next day Captain Crack-Shot died, and thus ended the career of a noted Western adventurer.

Deadwood Dick was requested by the citizens, whom he had been largely the means of re-establishing in the town, to accept the position of mayor over the prospective young city, but respectfully declined.

A few days later he quitted that vicinity,

accompanied by Calamity, and they set out for scenes anew, wherein to figure in spite of themselves in a life of commingled peril and adventure.

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